

Harvard  
Theological  
Review

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

**100:2**  
APRIL 2007  
ISSN 0017-8160



# Harvard Theological Review

## 100:2

ISSUED QUARTERLY BY THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The *Harvard Theological Review* is partially funded by the foundation established under the will of Mildred Everett, daughter of Charles Carroll Everett, Bussey Professor of Theology in Harvard University (1869–1900) and Dean of the Faculty of Divinity (1878–1900). The scope of the *Review* embraces history and philosophy of religious thought in all traditions and periods—including the areas of Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Christianity, Jewish studies, theology, ethics, archaeology, and comparative religious studies. It seeks to publish compelling original research that contributes to the development of scholarly understanding and interpretation.

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Manuscripts and communications on editorial matters should be addressed to the Managing Editor, *Harvard Theological Review*, Harvard Divinity School, 45 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138. "Instructions to Contributors" may be found in *HTR* 80:2 (April 1987) 243–60; an updated style sheet is available upon request ([htr@hds.harvard.edu](mailto:htr@hds.harvard.edu)).

For subscriptions (US): Subscription Coordinator, Cambridge University Press, 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473; tel: 800-872-7423 or 845-353-7500; fax: 845-353-4141. Email: [subscriptions\\_newyork@cambridge.org](mailto:subscriptions_newyork@cambridge.org). Annual subscription rate: Individuals, print only: US \$47 in the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico; £29 in UK, elsewhere. Institutions, print only: US \$118 in the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico; £72 in UK, elsewhere. Institutions, electronic only: US \$107 in the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico; £66 + VAT UK, elsewhere. Institutions, print and electronic: US \$128 in the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico; £78 in UK, elsewhere. Prices include surface postage and are payable in advance or on receipt of invoice; only personal check or credit card accepted for individual subscriptions (corporate check also accepted for institutional subscriptions). Website: [journals.cambridge.org](http://journals.cambridge.org). For subscriptions outside the US: Journals Marketing Department, Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 1BR, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 1223 326-070; fax: +44 (0) 1223 315052. Email: [journals\\_marketing@cambridge.org](mailto:journals_marketing@cambridge.org). VAT registration no: GB 214 1416 14. Payment in pounds sterling.

Back issues of vols. 1 (1908) through 93 (2000) are available from the Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main St., Germantown, NY 12526; tel: (518) 537-4700, fax: (518) 537-5899. For more recent issues, contact the journal's customer services at Cambridge University Press, 100 Brook Hill Drive, W. Nyack, NY 10994-2113; tel: 800-872-7423.

The foreign language and transliteration fonts used in this journal are available from Linguist's Software Inc., PO Box 580, Edmonds, WA 98020-0580 USA; tel: (425) 775-1130. Website: [www.linguistsoftware.com](http://www.linguistsoftware.com).

*Typeset in the Harvard Theological Review Offices, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Published by Cambridge University Press, New York, New York*

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SPECIAL ISSUE

*The God of Nicaea:  
Disputed Questions in  
Patristic Trinitarianism*

Guest Editor:

Sarah Coakley

Edward Mallinckrodt, Jr., Professor of Divinity

Editorial Assistant

Mark Scott, Ph.D. Candidate, Harvard University

*To the memory of*

*M. F. Wiles*

*priest, scholar, mentor, friend*



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## ARTICLES

- 125 Introduction: Disputed Questions in Patristic Trinitarianism  
*Sarah Coakley*
- PART I: *Nicaea and Its Legacy*: A Discussion**
- 141 *Nicaea and Its Legacy*: An Introduction  
*Lewis Ayres*
- 145 Response to Ayres: The Legacies of *Nicaea*, East and West  
*John Behr*
- 153 Yes and No: Reflections on Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*  
*Khaled Anatolios*
- 159 A Response to the Critics of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*  
*Lewis Ayres*
- 173 Final Reflections  
*John Behr and Khaled Anatolios*
- PART II: Beyond “East” and “West”: Re-Thinking Paradigms and Sources**
- 179 An Answer to de Régnon’s Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of “His” Paradigm  
*Kristin Hennessy*
- 199 Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus  
*Christopher A. Beeley*
- 215 *Quid tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *De Trinitate* 5 and 7  
*Richard Cross*
- 233 The Self Before God? Rethinking Augustine’s Trinitarian Thought  
*Matthew Drever*
- 243 BOOKS RECEIVED

## **PART I:**

### *Nicaea and Its Legacy: A Discussion*

# Introduction: Disputed Questions in Patristic Trinitarianism

Sarah Coakley

*Harvard Divinity School*

This special issue of *Harvard Theological Review* is devoted to a critical discussion of fourth-century Christian trinitarian theology, a topic that is now in a significant new phase of scholarly debate amongst both historical and systematic theologians. The papers and conversation published here arose from a day-conference on 5 May 2006 at Harvard Divinity School, when a number of invited scholars and doctoral students from Yale, Chicago, Emory, Fordham, Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, joined the students of the Harvard conference course, "Trinitarianism and Anti-trinitarianism: The Christian God in Dispute" (Spring 2006), for a day of shared papers and public debate.<sup>1</sup> The immediate focus of the event was a roundtable on Lewis Ayres's important new book, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and that discussion—in extended format—now makes up the first part of this issue. Other papers from students then followed, supplemented by comments from senior members from the floor. In the second part of this issue, two of those original papers, along with two other specially commissioned pieces—on Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine, respectively—extend and refine the debate outlined in the first part. This brief introduction will explain the wider significance of this ongoing debate about patristic trinitarianism, both East and West, and outline what this issue of *HTR* contributes to it.

<sup>1</sup> It is my pleasure here to extend special thanks to my Harvard doctoral student, Mark Scott, who not only served as Teaching Assistant for the course, but also played a vital role in assisting with the editorial production of the essays in this special issue of *HTR*. I am equally indebted to Margaret Studier and the whole team in the managerial office of *HTR*: their professionalism and attention to detail is exemplary, and their special commitment has enabled a speedy publication of these essays.

The history of scholarly analysis of Christian doctrine and its contestation in the early centuries of the Christian era has experienced certain notable periods of turbulence and redirection.<sup>2</sup> At such times a reconsideration of long-accepted pedagogical paradigms and a reflection on undergirding historiographical and philosophical presumptions, which may have sunk so deep as to become invisible, becomes a pressing necessity. Textbooks at such watershed moments have to be rewritten. Even if the systematic theologians often lag a generation behind their colleagues who do business with close textual and historical analysis, their theological assessments do also ultimately have to change.

Few would deny that such a period of transition and renegotiation of paradigms is currently in progress where the study of early Christianity is concerned. The analysis of the story of the development of early Christian doctrine, and especially of the doctrine of God, is undergoing multiple retellings at the beginning of the twenty-first century—to such an extent that the neophyte can be forgiven for suffering some sense of bewilderment. In practice, students are inducted into these debates either from the platform of the secular study of religion, or from the perspective of historical and systematic theology (although it is a moot point whether mutual enrichment cannot occur beyond the ideological *impasses*, which so often characterize the institutional separation of such approaches<sup>3</sup>). Undeniably the most publicized current dispute about early Christianity concerns the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy and their entanglement with issues of power, politics, and gender.<sup>4</sup> A second, and related, debate questions the boundaries (less clear than might have been thought) between Jewish and Christian ideas of God in the crucible years

<sup>2</sup> Ayres himself devotes the last part of his book (*Nicaea*, ch. 16) to an examination—which some readers will undeniably find contentious—of the ways in which “modern” authors massaged the story of early Christian doctrine to their own speculative or “systematic” ends. That part of the argument of *Nicaea* is discussed briefly in the last section of this “Introduction.” There exists at present no *general* history of significant moments of paradigmatic reassessment of early Christian thought, but *The Oxford Handbook to the Reception History of Christian Doctrine* (ed. Sarah Coakley and Richard Cross; Oxford: Oxford University Press, in preparation) will in due course attempt to remedy that gap.

<sup>3</sup> Ayres himself does to some extent manage to straddle this divide: he cites with appreciation, e.g., Elizabeth A. Clark, *History-Theory-Text* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), and Clark’s earlier programmatic essay, “Elite Networks and Heresy Accusations: Towards a Social Description of the Origenist Controversy,” *Semeia* 56 (1992) 79–117. But overall Ayres makes little attempt to confront the prevailing issues of power and gender with which feminist scholars of early Christianity have concerned themselves in recent years. For his discussion of Rebecca Lyman’s critical interaction with his book, however, see 160–63, below.

<sup>4</sup> One thinks here especially of the impact, both scholarly and popular, of books like *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine H. Pagels (New York: Random House, 1979) or *What is Gnosticism?* by Karen King (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Ayres does not directly tackle the issues raised in these volumes. That is not to say he is uninterested in questions of how power is related to claims to “orthodoxy”: see his allusions in this issue to the importance of Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe–IIIe siècles* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1985); and his recent edited special issue of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, “The Question of Orthodoxy,” *J ECS* 14 (2006) 395–98.

of the second century in which Christian apologists flexed their muscles against opponents both Jewish and pagan.<sup>5</sup> But another scholarly discourse, determinedly nonreductionist in its intent (indeed robustly theological), continues to chivvy away at questions of Christian *doctrinal truth* in relation to the emergence of the normative trinitarian view of God in the fourth century. This discourse, too, is in transition. This issue of *HTR* sets out to clarify, to criticize, and to extend the new developments in this third area. The debate involves historical, systematic, and historiographical levels of analysis, as I shall now briefly outline.

## ■ Historical and Textual Reassessment of the Emergence of Trinitarianism

Lewis Ayres's *Nicaea and Its Legacy* is undeniably a scholarly *tour de force*. Its first claim is that it is instigating a significant rethinking of the emergence of patristic trinitarianism at the level of texts and history.<sup>6</sup> Ayres rereads the critical period after the first Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.), which has been dominated in previous textbooks by over schematized accounts of differing Arian, Semi-Arian, and neo-Nicene groups. This rereading involves the enunciation of his key proposal: the category of “pro-Nicene,” as he argues, *unifies* the doctrinal strategies of authors in the 360s to 380s as apparently diverse as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Augustine.<sup>7</sup> All of these “pro-Nicene” authors, claims Ayres, share a similar “culture.”<sup>8</sup> They are committed to defending the “grammar” of Nicaea, but with a particular commitment to divine mystery and its impact on theological language, and to readings of the plain sense of Scripture sustained by practices of devotional transformation.<sup>9</sup> On this view, the much vaunted disjunction between East and West at this early stage of classic trinitarianism now

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., amongst recent discussions of this ilk, Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek?: Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002). Ayres, significantly, declares at the outset of *Nicaea* that this is not one of the issues that he can deal with in his book (*Nicaea*, 1 n.1).

<sup>6</sup> Ayres does devote the early part of his book to a rich discussion of developments in the doctrine of God before Nicaea (*Nicaea*, ch. 1), but by his own admission, his “paradigm-changing” theses are mainly concerned with the late-fourth century. In his questioning of older “heresiological categories” (*Nicaea*, 1), he follows Hanson (Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381 AD* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) and most other recent scholarship on post-Nicaean developments.

<sup>7</sup> See *Nicaea*, chs. 11–13 for Ayres’s detailed spelling out of the category “pro-Nicene” and what he sees as its three basic “strategies.”

<sup>8</sup> See *Nicaea*, 274–75, for the discussion of the meaning of “culture” in this context; and below, in this issue, 170–71, for his admission that this category needs further explication in relation to its “pro-Nicene” form.

<sup>9</sup> See *Nicaea*, 1, and then 274–78 for these points. Influences from Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, and Burrell (amongst others) may readily be detected in Ayres’s account of what is laudable in being “pro-Nicene,” somewhat giving the lie to his later claim that the return to this “pro-Nicene” approach must somehow probe behind modern presumptions.

appears suspect: “it is of far less significance than is usually thought.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly, this last claim of Ayres, if correct, has vital importance for both systematic and ecumenical concerns.

Ayres also makes two other important, and concomitant, claims about problems with “modernistic” textbook readings of fourth-century trinitarianism. On the one hand, discussion of the Trinity in this crucial late-fourth-century period has been falsely divided from questions of Christology;<sup>11</sup> on the other, the account has to a significant extent ignored the dependence of the theological arguments of the time on biblical exegesis (and on the concerns and practices that sustained such exegesis). The story needs to be retold; for, as Ayres puts it, “recent Trinitarian theology has engaged the legacy of Nicaea at a fairly shallow level, frequently relying on assumptions about Nicene theology that are historically indefensible and overlooking the wider theological matrices within which particular theological terminologies were situated.”<sup>12</sup>

Much of the interest in the first part of this issue of *HTR*, then, concerns the assessment of these three fundamental axioms of Ayres’s argument. As we shall see, Ayres’s immediate interlocutors in Part I, John Behr and Khaled Anatolios, make different assessments of the success, or otherwise, of the three basic methodological moves, as they see it.

First, there are certain dangers in the unifying “pro-Nicene” tag that Ayres now champions. For it could turn out to *overcompensate*—by a certain sleight of hand—for an earlier (and demonstrably false) disjunction between East and West, which has indeed beguiled the systematicians for much of the twentieth century. This is John Behr’s main bone of contention. As he perceptively points out, Ayres’s account of the “pro-Nicene” at times involves a rereading of the thought of the Cappadocians through the lens of categories more natural to Augustine. Even to talk of “the triune God,” or to understand Gregory of Nazianzus as finding the unity of “the Godhead” somewhere else than in the “Father,” is—for Behr—to beg the question. (Later, in Part II of this issue, Christopher Beeley drives home this latter point the more forcibly, arguing that we should read Nazianzen *consistently* on the “monarchy” of the Father, rather than finding in him an occasional drift towards locating the divine unity in an abstract “Godhead.”<sup>13</sup>) In other words, Ayres’s “pro-Nicene” category may artfully smudge differences which do indeed still

<sup>10</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> These categories are of course themselves the abstractions of later “dogmatics” or “systematics,” which Ayres in principle opposes. However, even to continue to talk about “Trinitarianism,” as Ayres does throughout his book, might be said to remain somewhat in thrall to those categories.

<sup>12</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Much depends here on how we read the somewhat ambiguous Greek of important passages such as Gregory’s *Oration* 31.14 (on which, see Beeley’s detailed analysis below). Even then, there remains the possibility that Nazianzen is simply inconsistent on this key issue of divine unity and causality: so Richard Cross, “Divine Monarchy in Gregory of Nazianzus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006) 105–16.

remain between a biblically rooted understanding of God as “Father,” maintained consistently in the early Greek writers and enshrined in the Greek liturgy, and an emerging discourse of divine “trinity,” which already sowed seeds for later Western scholastic developments.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, on the question of the false textbook divide between trinitarianism and Christology, Behr and Anatolios both support Ayres in his laudably integrative goals on this score. But they also agree, in their different ways, that here he announces rather more than he can actually deliver in *Nicaea and Its Legacy*. Maybe those attempting to effect a major paradigm reform in the history of doctrine can either swing the pendulum too far to the other extreme in compensation for a distorted earlier account (as, putatively, with Ayres’s unifying “pro-Nicene” category) or can continue in somewhat occluded ways to manifest features of what they ostensibly decry. Behr claims that the latter problem afflicts Ayres in his well intentioned announcement of the need to bring Christology fully into the story of emergent patristic trinitarianism. In line with Behr’s own recent reemphasis on the importance of the passion narrative for early Christian doctrine,<sup>15</sup> Behr points to the absence in Ayres’s account of a *consistent* attention to the Son’s earthly drama and passion; at the same time he occasionally detects in it an anachronistic reading of Christ’s pre-existence as somehow *predating* Jesus’ earthly career.<sup>16</sup> The old textbook disjunction between Trinity and Christology seemingly dies hard. Anatolios criticizes Ayres on the same score and complains that the significance of Athanasius’s contribution to later “pro-Nicene” patterns of thought has been underestimated by Ayres, precisely because he remains still too much in thrall to a formulaic approach to the Trinity (even as he denies it).<sup>17</sup> A text “On the Incarnation” can tell us as much, at the same time, about soteriology and the Trinity as it does about Christology, provided we have not made these *loci* disjunct at the outset.

By the same token, one may object that Ayres’s third call for closer attention to biblical-exegetical moves by the patristic authors has only selectively been carried out by Ayres himself in *Nicaea and Its Legacy*. Much depends here, of course, on what one means by the “plain sense” of Scripture. Maurice Wiles raised this point in his review of Ayres’s book, written shortly before Wiles’s untimely death.<sup>18</sup> Wiles’s

<sup>14</sup> It should be pointed out that Ayres himself underscores that “differences” do remain between Greek and Latin “pro-Nicene” authors (and also between different authors writing in the same language); and he underscores the “diversity” of “pro-Nicene” perspectives right from the start of his book (see already *Nicaea*, 1: “This paradigm attempts . . . to respect the diversity of “pro-Nicene” theologies better than available accounts.”).

<sup>15</sup> See John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2006) esp. ch. 1.

<sup>16</sup> This tendency is also blamed by Behr on Augustine (see also Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*, 174). Ayres replies to this charge in his second input to this issue of *HTR*, below, 166–69.

<sup>17</sup> See below what Ayres says about Athanasius (143–44), as well as Anatolios’s critique (155–56) and Ayres’s reply (164–65).

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Wiles, review of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 56 (2005) 670–75.

long-standing interest in the way that the Arian camp read scripture—differently of course from the “pro-Nicenes,” but no less interestingly and creatively, according to him—causes him to query Ayres’s presumption of an uncomplicated plain sense.<sup>19</sup> Ayres responds briefly to Wiles’s critique in this issue.<sup>20</sup> But he would admit that the tracing of the intricate connections between exegetical, and more strictly doctrinal, conclusions in this era of patristic thought needs much continuing scholarly attention: *Nicaea and Its Legacy* announces a program that others will have to assist in carrying through.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, Ayres also points out that the attempt to relate doctrinal development more closely to the liturgical and prayer life of the early church (the *lex orandi, lex credendi* approach) has so far suffered from romantic assimilations rather than truly penetrating accounts of the relationship. But this nexus, too, urgently needs critical attention.<sup>22</sup> By his own lights, then, Ayres acknowledges that the ambitions for methodological change that he has so sharply announced in *Nicaea and Its Legacy* are, perforce, only partially carried through by him in this volume itself. Ayres has thrown down his gauntlet; others can take it up.

Much of the scholarly stimulation at the level of historical and textual analysis in Ayres’s book, then, resides in his methodological or theoretical *framing* of the narrative. For here Ayres calls into play categories of analysis (“grammar,” “practice,” “strategy,” “culture,” etc.) which have their acknowledged roots in twentieth-century philosophy and social science, but which Ayres deems newly illuminating for the telling of the fourth-century account.<sup>23</sup> In other ways (as Anatolios charges, and Ayres himself admits at one point), the *actual* historical account given is not radically different—in fact remarkably consonant—with that given in important recent studies by Simonetti and Hanson.<sup>24</sup> This realization may lead us to conclude that the main drama and debate to be precipitated by Ayres’s book may lie, after all, not so much in the realm of the historical after all, but in the impact of Ayres’s reframing of the story on systematic and ecumenical questions. For all his decrying of the category of “systematic theology” in favor of “historical theology” (a pronouncement that dominates the final section of Ayres’s book), it is arguably in the arena of the systematic, after all, that Ayres’s overturning of paradigms is the more novel and important. To this second level of discussion we now turn.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 674.

<sup>20</sup> See below, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Anatolios remarks, for instance, on the irony of Ayres’s lack of attention in *Nicaea* to the first five (Scriptural) books of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (see below, 156–57). To be fair, Ayres has announced the publication of another book on Augustine that will doubtless remedy this gap.

<sup>22</sup> See below, 144.

<sup>23</sup> See Ayres, *Nicaea*, chs. 11–13, and esp. 273–78.

<sup>24</sup> Ayres actually acknowledges the same point, *Nicaea*, 5.



## ■ Beyond East and West in Systematic Accounts of Patristic Trinitarianism

The idea that, already in the late-fourth- and early-fifth-century trinitarianism of the Cappadocians and Augustine, the East starts from the three and moves to the one (favoring analogies that illustrate the relation of the particular to the generic, such as three men and one humanity), while the West starts from the one and moves to the three (favoring the so-called psychological analogies of Augustine), has obtained the unfortunate status of a truism in much systematic theological work of the later twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Generations of students have been pedagogically formed by this misleading narrative. Moreover, this story about the supposed early separation of Eastern and Western views of the Trinity has become further entangled, in the course of the twentieth century, with certain additions and accretions with obvious—often negative—ecumenical import. There are, for instance, the following claims: that only the East retains a proper sense of dynamism and mystery (or mystical theology) in its trinitarian theology, which the theology of the West purportedly lacks;<sup>26</sup> that only the East has a “relational” account of the trinitarian persons;<sup>27</sup> that the East thereby has a “social trinitarianism,” which can be made a direct prototype for a nonhierarchical ecclesiology;<sup>28</sup> or that Augustine can be blamed for initiating the modern project of individualism and Cartesian selfhood (and thus ultimately for undermining a trinitarian view of God altogether in the modern period).<sup>29</sup>

Ayres does not trouble himself overmuch<sup>30</sup> with these later accretions, since he aims to cut right at the root of the narrative of an early East/West divergence in trinitarian thought. Fundamentally his exploration of a “pro-Nicene culture” undertakes this concern. From where, then, did the myth of an early disjunction between Eastern and Western trinitarianism even arise? Ayres follows an important article by Michel Barnes (“De Régnon Reconsidered”) in tracing the origins of this modern narrative to the impact of Théodore de Régnon’s influential *Études de*

<sup>25</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 385 n. 3. cite many of the recent systematic treatments of the Trinity (e.g., by Jürgen Moltmann, Colin Gunton, Catherine LaCugna, David Brown) that express this viewpoint, noting that much of this work unthinkingly replicates received paradigms; see also my own brief discussion of this tradition of systematic trinitarian thinking in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 2–6.

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (trans. members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius; Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1957).

<sup>27</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). On this representation of Augustine, and on other similar charges against Augustine, see Michel René Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 237–50.

<sup>30</sup> There are only brief critical asides about Lossky, Zizioulas, Volf, and Gunton woven into *Nicaea*, ch. 16.

*théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (1892–1898).<sup>31</sup> But in one important footnote (which might easily go unnoticed), Ayres acknowledges that de Régnon’s position on Greek and Latin differentiation is a little more subtle than often presumed: de Régnon himself sees a consistency between “pre-Nicene Latin” and Cappadocian thought.<sup>32</sup> The concession is important, since in the wake of Barnes’s article we see already a discernible trend towards treating de Régnon, now, as the new theological whipping boy in a story of declension, such as Ayres’s, from patristic truth to modern aberration.

Precisely on this point the contribution by Kristin Hennessy in Part II of this issue is of importance. Hennessy’s close reading of de Régnon’s three untranslated volumes (a feat undertaken by few!) establishes that de Régnon has rarely been attended to with care, especially amongst English-speakers,<sup>33</sup> and is in particular danger of being misconstrued at this new moment of “paradigm” transition. De Régnon himself does not, for instance, make Eastern and Western trinitarianisms disjunct; on the contrary, his intention is always to insist that Greek and Latin emphases (his terms) are mutually corrective and complementary and both subject to the necessary enshrouding in mystery that the unique subject of the Trinity demands. Further, and the more intriguingly, de Régnon does *not* drive a wedge between the Greek writers of the late fourth century and Ambrose and Augustine. Indeed, his views are ironically akin to Ayres’s (as Hennessy notes in closing) in finding a basic consistency in the intentions of this cluster of patristic authors on the Trinity; often he will call this whole group “Greek,” by which he means patristic (reserving the appellation “Latin” for later scholastic thought). Although de Régnon sees in Augustine certain seeds of Western scholasticism to come, he does not find in Augustine’s trinitarian project any sort of radical disjunction from the Greek patristic tradition that inspired it. Finally, we cannot understand de Régnon’s project at all, Hennessy underscores, unless we place him in his own historical, ecclesiastical, and political context. His textbook project aimed to correct, and subtly to rebuke, a certain false homogenizing and scholasticizing of tradition, which emerged in the wake of Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879), and the new normativity granted there to Aquinas’s thought. By insisting that the patristic tradition that preceded Western scholasticism was labile, internally complex, and deeply aware of divine mystery, de

<sup>31</sup> See Michel René Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995) 51–79, which charts some of the impact of, and secondary interpretative accretions upon, Théodore de Régnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris: Retaux, 1892–1898).

<sup>32</sup> See Ayres, *Nicaea*, 413 n. 56. Ayres also applauds de Régnon’s account of patristic Christology (*Nicaea*, 302–4).

<sup>33</sup> Amongst French scholars, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (trans. David Smith; New York: Crossroad, 1997; see esp. vol. 3, xvi–xvii), reads de Régnon accurately and perceptively, as does André de Halleux, “Personnalisme ou Essentialisme Trinitaire chez Les Pères Cappadociens,” *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 17 (1986) 129–55, 265–92. Perhaps one of the main practical reasons that de Régnon remains ill-considered in the Anglophone world, and especially in the United States, is that there are relatively few copies of his work available in American libraries (and those that are available, e.g., in the Widener Library at Harvard, are now “brittle” and thus restricted in their public use).

Régnon consistently — and fearlessly — pushed back against the more rigid Roman neo-Thomist trends of his day. Before we lard de Régnon with blame for a century of systematic misreading of the patristic trinitarian sources, Hennessy concludes, we should be careful to distinguish de Régnon himself from careless readers, who have appealed to his paradigm whilst actually parodying and distorting it.

Interestingly, one of the details of exegesis that Hennessy's reading of de Régnon takes up in passing, is the problem that de Régnon himself confronted in his exegesis of Gregory of Nazianzus: how was the question of the trinitarian monarchy to be read in his corpus?<sup>34</sup> De Régnon, unlike Behr and Beeley in this issue (but *with* Ayres's reading in *Nicaea and Its Legacy*<sup>35</sup>), found Nazianzus on occasion to be ascribing trinitarian unity to the "Godhead"; this detail is, in itself, a witness to the closeness of de Régnon's analysis and to his own refusal to be boxed into the disjunctive generalizations about "Greek" and "Latin" thought which are often attributed to him. Quite a lot hangs, then, as we have now seen, on this question of how to read Nazianzus within the nexus of fourth-century variations on the "pro-Nicene" response, since those wishing to maintain some sort of consistent Eastern distinctiveness about the monarchy of the Father will want to count Nazianzus as a prototype. Beeley's *riposte* to Ayres in this issue must therefore be weighed with care, since it has some ecumenical, as well as merely exegetical, significance.

The last two contributors to the issue, Cross and Drever, also take up detailed points of trinitarian discussion which have ecumenical and systematic significance, this time in relation to neglected, or misconstrued, facets of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Both are responding to the charge of the late Colin Gunton that Augustine's so-called psychological approach to the Trinity is a harbinger of modern individualism and that Augustine fails even to understand the meaning of *hypostasis* in "Eastern," Cappadocian thought.<sup>36</sup> Cross's essay gives attention to a much neglected element in Augustine's trinitarian armory: his discussion, in *De Trinitate* books 5 and 7, of how, and in what sense, God is three "persons." The neglect is surely, in part, blindness created by the old paradigm — that only the psychological analogies attract and intrigue Augustine and that the Greek language of *hypostasis* is quite beyond his ken. Yet, as Cross elegantly shows in this article, Augustine seems fully aware of the "individual/generic" analogy used for the Trinity in Basil and Nyssen, and is not only cautious about it (as too is Gregory of Nyssa, when properly understood), but also explicitly rejecting of it. For Augustine, "persona" is a "genus" word (to use a modern philosophical term of analysis), and as such it is hard for Augustine to see what "species" three such *personae* could possibly have in common. As Cross shows, this does indeed imply a "prima facie divergence" from the Greek authors;<sup>37</sup> but given the differences of emphasis even between the individual Cappadocians

<sup>34</sup> Hennessy draws attention to this exegetical point, 189 n. 36, below.

<sup>35</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 244–51.

<sup>36</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, esp. 39–40.

<sup>37</sup> See Cross, below, 230.

on this crucial point, we should continue to be wary of disjunctive generalizations. Again, then, the lesson is that the patristic authors of this period do have certain fundamental commitments in common in explicating the doctrine of the Trinity, but a good deal of significant variations remain between them as well. Reflecting only on some of their analogies and discussions, and blindly ignoring others, should not mislead us. Too much is at stake both philosophically and ecumenically.

Drever's article comes to similar conclusions. By reading those sections of the *De Trinitate* that reflect on the self before God (as made in the *imago Dei*) alongside parallel discussions about selfhood in Augustine's *Confessions* and his commentary on Genesis, Drever gives the lie to the presumption that Augustine's arguments are falsely founded in speculative neo-Platonism, rather than in biblical or doctrinal reflection, or that Augustine's views about the self thus anticipate the secular modern "turn to the subject," ultimately rendering the trinitarian God redundant. On the contrary, argues Drever, such readings merely presume what they conclude; it is rather that Augustine's vision of the self is already rooted in the trinitarian God, and thus that the structure of the human mind can only be made known *through the Trinity*. The "psychological analogies" (which in any case are not the only ones considered by Augustine, as we have already noted) should therefore not be read as anticipations of modern monistic selfhood but as indicators of the self's being made precisely in the *imago Dei* (the image of the Trinity), and engaging restlessly in search of divine transformation and salvation in relation to that Trinity. Hence it is not the triadic structure of the human mind that allows us to understand God, says Drever, but rather the trinitarian God who leaves his imprint on the human mind as an invitation to relationship. And even the favored analogies of the mind are ultimately found fallible by Augustine, subject to the same limitations as all the others, given the uniqueness of the divine and the creaturely fallibility of the human.<sup>38</sup>

The systematic and ecumenical implications of Ayres's call to reconsider the relation of Greek and Latin versions of fourth-century "pro-Nicene" theology, which this issue of *HTR* further investigates, must by now be obvious. Once the false wedge between East and West in this early period is removed, certain sorts of polemicizing about the innate superiority of one approach over the other become suspect, and we are returned to the texts themselves with fresh eyes, and—by implication—with fresh possibilities for ecumenical engagement. The marked capacity of Western systematicians, in recent years, to self-flagellate about the shortcomings of their own Augustinian tradition, and to prefer instead the "Eastern promise" of so-called social trinitarianism, looks suspect indeed once the misreadings on which such a propulsion has been based are brought into the light of day. And it is such fashions

<sup>38</sup> See *Trin.* 15.4.26, and Drever's discussion below, 239–41. Drever's article follows the trend in Augustinian scholarship initiated by Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and Michel René Barnes, and recently taken up more insistently, in comparison with the modern Cartesian tradition, by Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

and fads of the modern period that cause Ayres (in chapter 16 of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*) to decry the task of systematic theology altogether, in favor of a close historical account. Yet what this issue of *HTR* has now added to Ayres's proposal, whilst also extending and nuancing its key claims, are the following: first, a certain set of cautions about the dangers of exegetical overreaction to the old paradigm (since careful readings still show us *differences* between, and within, the Greek and Latin trinitarian thinkers of this period, as Ayres too acknowledges); second, a certain warning against false blaming of new theological scapegoats from the past (since authors such as de Régnon and Lossky turn out to be more subtle in their approach than often presumed<sup>39</sup>); and third, a certain scepticism about Ayres's charge that systematics can, and should, be eschewed altogether. To this last point we now turn in a short concluding section.

### ■ Historiography in Nicaea and Its Legacies

In the introduction to *Nicaea and Its Legacies*, Ayres makes the claim that he would rather do “historical theology” (as he dubs what he is doing in this book), than “modern Trinitarianism,” not because the latter “has engaged with pro-Nicene theology badly,” but because “it has barely engaged with it at all.”<sup>40</sup> In chapter 16 (“In Spite of Hegel, Fire and Sword”), the last chapter of his book, this thesis is spelled out with boldness, *panache*, and an extraordinary display of learning. There are a number of basic thrusts to the argument, which are worthy of brief, critical review; for as Ayres reveals more of his critique of modern systematic theology, his own alternative becomes clearer and—paradoxically—murkier at the same time.<sup>41</sup>

The entire modern project of trinitarian theology, first, is found by Ayres to have been in thrall to certain “meta-narrative strategies” which obstruct the cause of “pro-Nicene” thought. There are basically three such strategies, Ayres suggests. Modern theology has assumed that premodern theology is “heteronomous,” and in need of release from authority; it has presented classical Christian theology as falsely entangled with static Greek metaphysics; and it has set fidelity to Scripture into a misleading disjunction with the apologetic utilization of pagan philosophy. Moreover, claims Ayres, the very undertaking of systematic theology, in the

<sup>39</sup> Hennessy supplies this warning in relation to de Régnon in this issue. At the day conference last year Aristotle Papanikolaou of Fordham University also made an important intervention in defense of Vladimir Lossky, and in clarification of Lossky's understanding and use of de Régnon. He pointed out that Lossky does not argue for the superiority of the “Eastern” approach because the East “starts from the three” (a misreading of de Régnon, in any case), but rather because the Cappadocian and Dionysian traditions in the East are seen as appropriately *apophatic* compared with the scholastic tradition of the West. On this point, see further, Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism and Divine-Human Communion* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 181 n. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 7; see 5 for “historical theology.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 16, but esp. 384–92.

guise we now know it, was concocted out of these same modern aberrations. What modern Protestantism created (a new tendency to *ground* Christian belief in rational or empirical truths that purportedly could be established elsewhere), was soon emulated, in various guises, by nineteenth-century Roman Catholic theology. And one of the egregious pedagogical results was a new disjunction between such systematics and other demarcated disciplines in the theological curriculum (historical theology, Scripture). The “pro-Nicene” commitment to the plain meaning of Scripture, sustained by contemplative practice and undergirded by a profound sense of mystery, withered on the modern branch. The prime suspect in the modern story of trinitarian theology, as far as Ayres is concerned, is Hegel, whose distorting idealist influence on modern dogmatics—and not least on Barth—he greatly bemoans; and Rahner, too, is summarily dismissed—in two short pages—as sharing equally in “a Hegelian or idealist paradigm.”<sup>42</sup> So even the notable “trinitarian revival” of the last generation represents, for Ayres, a dangerous delusion. Its craze for “social trinitarianism” merely smuggled a Kantian vision of selfhood—times three!—into the Godhead, thereby rebaptizing modernity, even as it supposedly critiqued it.<sup>43</sup>

Ayres’s tirade against modern trinitarian theology is unnervingly sweeping, but he does admit at one point that his “brief characterizations overly simplify a complex situation.”<sup>44</sup> The reader cannot but be stimulated by his polemics and by the prodigious learning displayed; yet doubts, quibbles, and questions do remain. What emerges as the dialectical alternative to modern trinitarianism for Ayres, unsurprisingly, is the adulated culture of “pro-Nicene” theology. This, finally, may be termed a “theology of theology,” he says, since it involves a contemplation of Scripture, which can “function as the core of the theologian’s attention when thinking about basic Christian doctrines,”<sup>45</sup> yet without eschewing a critical and selective use of philosophical resources to aid illumination of those doctrines. And faith, according to Ayres, must supply what reason and empirical history can never adequately demonstrate: that the Church is continually, and *authoritatively*, sustained by the activity of the Spirit, and consistent doctrinal development mysteriously thereby guided and guaranteed.<sup>46</sup>

Ayres adds to these latter historiographical reflections in the current issue of *HTR*. In responding to critics from what he calls the “left” and “right,” he shows more of his methodological hand. An appeal to the Spirit’s operation in the history of the Church becomes the more explicit, as does a certain acknowledged *aporia* about how to speak about “continuity and change” in Christian doctrinal development.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 407–14.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 425–29.

<sup>47</sup> See Ayres’s second input in this issue, 159–71, esp. 164–66.

Much remains still undeveloped in his proposed Christian historiography, by Ayres's own admission, even though this issue of *HTR* adds a great deal to our understanding of his position. Three final critical reflections in this *Introduction* may perhaps aid further debate.

First, it must surely be admitted that Ayres is himself, under the guise of his preferred trope of "historical theology," engaged in a fully systematic enterprise. It would be ironic if his project succumbed to the same sort of genetic fallacy that he rightly sniffs out in the modernist attempt to recover an original Christian purity; yet there are certainly moments when, rhetorically at least, "pro-Nicene theology" takes up a position ironically similar to this in Ayres's narrative. Thus, whereas Harnack adulated Jesus' teaching over a later collusion with Greek metaphysics, now Ayres adulates "pro-Nicene" theology over modernity's aberrations. But Ayres is, of course, far too sophisticated a thinker not to notice such dangers! And so, by the end of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, he has to admit that all historical reconstruction, and indeed all "contemplation of Scripture," is always already infused with philosophic and hermeneutical theorizing, whether implicit or explicit;<sup>48</sup> and if this is so, then it surely cannot be that systematic undertakings are, intrinsically and per se, distorting of theological truth. Rather, it is a *particular* set of modern systematic presumptions that Ayres seeks to expose and reject; whereas his own alternatives are no less systematic, normative, and—by extension—open to critical examination, as those he chooses to discard. It is just that he prefers to call them "historiographical" principles, rather than "systematic" ones.

Secondly, and concomitantly, we have already noted that certain key terms from contemporary postmodern anthropology and philosophy ("culture," "strategy," "grammar," "practice," "phenomenology") are required to do heavy-lifting work in Ayres's normative narrative, and it is to his credit that he is willing, in one important section of his book, to give an explicit account of his sources of authority on this score.<sup>49</sup> Yet once this aspect of his argument is acknowledged, it is again clear that his "historical theology" is a little more theoretically complex—and indeed a little more open to question—than we might initially imagine. For what constitutes the boundaries of a "culture" is notoriously hard to discern, just as what counts as proper "grammar" may be difficult, even—indeed especially—for a native speaker to justify. So the appeal to these currently fashionable categories of analysis (all too easy to pronounce, as if mantrically, in the context of contemporary cultural studies) may bring its own dangers of limited shelf life, as well as adding to the inscrutability of the question of how to discern the edges of doctrinal orthodoxy.

Finally, it is to Ayres's credit that he insists that "historical theology" should always be willing to be porous to other disciplines, without being tempted to be *reduced* to them. Yet it has to be said (as already mentioned at the start of this "Introduction") that he is more willing to consider the lessons of some such cognate

<sup>48</sup> See Ayres, *Nicaea*, 422–23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 11–13.

disciplines than others. His engagement with gender analysis, as we noted, is slight (and this at a time when much scholarly effort is being applied to analyzing the relation of gender and “heresy” in the early Christian centuries); and the insights of classical sociological theory do not impinge to any great degree on his narrative either. Be that as it may (and Ayres might well respond that he was “coming to that”), what strikes the systematician finally, in reflecting on the significance and distinctiveness of Ayres’s *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, is the remarkable underlying appeal to the Spirit’s operation in Christian history. It is a nice irony, as Ayres has himself admitted in private correspondence, that what causes him ire in his rejection of Hegel (Hegel’s pneumatology), can become for Ayres, in turn, the distinctive means whereby the maintenance of the authority of “the Church” is affirmed, and the elusive mechanics of doctrinal development assured.<sup>50</sup> If this is not systematics, then, it is certainly a pneumatological metaphysics of history. As this issue of *HTR* reminds us afresh, debates about doctrine are rarely free of historiographical bag and baggage. It is not the least of the remarkable achievements of Lewis Ayres’s recent work to bring this dimension of patristic study to new consciousness. It is to be hoped that the critical responses, extensions of argument, and conceptual and theological clarifications found in this issue of *HTR* will extend the scholarly debate occasioned by Ayres’s volume, and provide illumination for students of both historical and systematic theology.

<sup>50</sup> Ayres (private correspondence, 2 January 2007): “. . . we should have faith in the Spirit’s guidance of the Church over time, but . . . our response should not be one of white-washing the messiness of that development, but rather one of a two-fold belief in narrating the course of continuity and development . . . and recognizing that such continuity is the Spirit’s work and remains mysterious. . . . I add, half-jokingly, that of course often when something appears to be Hegel it’s his work as palimpsest: the echo of real Christianity showing through what he’s overlaid . . .”



# *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Introduction*\*

Lewis Ayres

Emory University

## ■ The Done and the Left Undone

It is a privilege to have the opportunity for such extended reflection on my book *Nicaea and Its Legacy*.<sup>1</sup> No doubt some authors feel that their manuscripts are truly finished before they are published: I am one of those who merely abandons a manuscript to the copy editors when other pressures demand an end to hostilities. It should be no surprise, then, that I have always envisaged *Nicaea* as a snapshot of a moving landscape, not just in the ever-growing body of scholarship on the fourth century, but also in my own thinking. Accordingly I will begin here as I was invited to do in our discussion at Harvard, by offering an account of what I think *Nicaea* accomplishes and of some areas in which the book needs further work.

I hope that one of the most useful contributions *Nicaea* makes to debate over fourth-century Christianity is in offering an account of pro-Nicene trinitarianism in which Greek, Latin, and Syriac speakers shared a set of fundamental “strategies” in their trinitarian theologies. Because these strategies are shared, I argued, pro-Nicene theologies should not be divided most fundamentally into distinct “Eastern” and

\* I would like to thank Sarah Coakley for her generosity in organizing the conference from which this issue of *HTR* has been produced, as well as for her comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I would also like to thank Mark DelCogliano, Rebecca Lyman, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Medi Ann Volpe for their comments. It should be noted that throughout this paper my concern is with readers of the fourth-century controversies who have overt theological commitments and ends in view. There are many other scholars of the period for whom the debates I engage here will be initially uninteresting. It remains true, however, both that such scholars find themselves implicated in scholarly opinions driven (to a greater or lesser extent) by modern theological concerns, and that many assumptions about the explanatory power of social-historical theories are themselves deeply theological in nature. Hence it may well be that awareness of these discussions is of importance across the field of early Christian studies.

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

“Western” sets. This is not to deny that there are differences between and among Greek and Latin theologians (and it is to offer no judgment about differences that may have emerged in later centuries), but it is to assert a fundamental identity at the level of those principles that were, at the time, taken to be at the core of pro-Nicene trinitarianism—Greek, Latin or Syriac. I also argued that in some ways the first of these strategies—a manner of insisting on the unity of God and the irreducibility of the three persons—appears particularly clearly in contemporary imperial legislation. There we find the irreducibility of the divine nature, power, essence, glory, and the irreducibility of the divine persons or hypostases asserted, and yet a variety of terminologies are taken to be acceptable. This basic distinction between unity and diversity is itself interpreted by other principles clearly stated by pro-Nicenes, with the doctrines of inseparable operation and the simplicity of the Godhead being particularly important. One other important function of these principles is to provide the context within which the traditional taxis of Father-Son and Spirit (and the Father’s *monarchia*) was understood. Pro-Nicenes—again in East and West—are insistent on this taxis.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapters 12 and 13 of *Nicaea* I argued that this first strategy is inseparable from two others. One is a series of christological assumptions which stem from a pro-Nicene understanding of the Word as a co-equal person in the indivisible Godhead. Understandings of the Word as immediately sustaining the creation go hand in hand with accounts of salvation as a sharing in the Word’s very life. Both help to create a sense of the mysteriousness of the created order and of the human being. The final strategy is a series of assumptions about the nature of human purification and spiritual progress (concomitant with the second strategy) that shapes pro-Nicene scriptural exegesis. Understanding these interrelated strategies is, I argued, essential to seeing the full context of pro-Nicene trinitarian discussion. Grasping something of the way in which these strategies are interrelated also provides the basis on which I suggest we can speak of a pro-Nicene theological “culture”—although here perhaps more than anywhere we need to look at the ways in which this culture was manifest in and through local contexts and traditions.

One aspect of my argument, offered *en passant* but probably of particular interest to modern “systematic” theologians, is my suggestion that the practice of dividing pro-Nicenes into distinct groups by reference to the fundamental analogies they use is unsustainable. In the first place, pro-Nicenes use a wide variety of analogies; in the second, pro-Nicenes use different analogies in different contexts and with much greater hesitation than we tend to do! The assumption that the use of a particular analogy determines the character of the unity and diversity fourth-century authors see in the Trinity is also, I would argue, without foundation. More specifically,

<sup>2</sup> See *Nicaea*, 278–300. For the definitions used in imperial legislation, see *Nicaea*, 251–53. These texts seem to contain strategies of definition parallel to those used in the text of a letter stemming from the 382 Council in Constantinople, which is likely to represent as close a view as we can get of the language used at Constantinople I in 381. See Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.9; *Nicaea*, 258.

I have also argued that the use of an extended social analogy (by which I mean the use of three human persons as an analogy for the Trinity that does more than assert a parallel with the logic of individual and species relationships) is extremely rare, and—to be provocative—is as common in Augustine as it is in any of the Cappadocians. This is not to say that one cannot trace common patterns of analogical usage among particular traditions, but good work in this area is scarce and much remains to be done.

This last sentence brings us to a set of questions about which I think *Nicaea* has some suggestions to make, but also to one which fourth-century scholarship will increasingly need to reconsider. How should we envisage unity and diversity among pro-Nicenes? Where can we identify distinct pro-Nicene traditions, and on what basis do we do so? Just as an earlier generation of scholarship did much to demonstrate the complexity of non-Nicene theology, it is time now to do the same for pro-Nicene. Indeed, how we should even define the pro-Nicene? My approach so far has been to search for a minimal definition while also arguing that pro-Nicene theology developed over a period of time. Some of those we identify as archetypical pro-Nicene figures were, at least for much of their careers, only partially—even if significantly—pro-Nicene, rather than fully so. Hilary of Poitiers and Athanasius are particularly significant members of this group. One finds in their later works some of the key principles whose implications are worked over during the period between 360 and 380, but often these principles sit alongside others barely consonant with them.

An ongoing conversation with Michel Barnes has been the context within which my own definition has evolved. Barnes distinguishes between Neo- and Pro-Nicene theology, and distinguishes both from the “old” Nicene theology of *Nicaea*’s framers and first defenders. I prefer to speak similarly of “old” Nicene theology, but then to speak of “pro-Nicene” as a constantly developing theology with at least two significant phases between 360 and 380.<sup>3</sup> In this debate we share common assumptions that older debates about the differences between “Nicene” and “Neo-Nicene” are misleading, both when they assume too determined a content for either term, and also when they assume that a pure Nicene position was present in Athanasius from which later theology did or did not vary. Despite our agreement here, I am not yet convinced that the evidence provides sufficient clarity for us to use two distinct terms to name phases of Nicene theological development. The fluidity between the phases of Nicene theology, especially the persistence of arguments from the first phase into those who are exemplary of the second, indicates that we should be wary of too easy a division here. While Barnes is certainly correct to highlight

<sup>3</sup> For my definition of “old-Nicene” see Ayres, *Nicaea*, 98–100; for “pro-Nicene” see Ayres, *Nicaea*, 236–40. For Barnes’s accounts see “One Nature, One Power: Consensus Doctrine in Pro-Nicene Polemic,” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997) 205–23; idem, “*De Trinitate* VI and VII: Augustine and the Limits of Nicene Orthodoxy,” *AugStud*, forthcoming. My own definitions of pro-Nicene continue to evolve: see my *Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) ch. 2.

the changing shape of exegetical debate as a central location of these shifts, local variation prevents us from identifying debate over a particular text (such as John 5:19) as a necessary marker of the pro-Nicene. My position in this debate will no doubt change as our work advances.

Nevertheless, despite these disagreements, Barnes and I concur with much recent scholarship in viewing these controversies as fundamentally exegetical in character. As scholars have come to be more interested in the dynamics of premodern exegesis on its own terms (whether or not they also wish to call for its use in modern theology), they have been better able to examine the complex mix of exegesis and philosophical reflection that shaped trinitarian debate. My own approach has focused on emphasizing the importance of what I have termed “grammatical” exegesis in doctrinal argument and on showing how philosophical work was an integral part of these exegetical techniques.<sup>4</sup> While I hope *Nicaea* contributes to our understanding of exegetical argument, it is interesting to note how much this marks a common concern of a wide range of current writers on this period. For example, in his reviews of our books, Maurice Wiles criticizes both John Behr and me for the willingness to advocate for the modern use of some early Christian exegetical practices.<sup>5</sup>

In concluding these initial comments I would also like to identify four theologians about whom I would like to have said much more: Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius, Didymus, and Marius Victorinus. All four are greatly understudied and all four are far more significant (for various reasons) than *Nicaea* might indicate. I avoided spending time on the cluster of works that have frequently been attributed to Didymus simply because of the uncertainty that surrounds them. In retrospect this seems mistaken, given the great deal of extra evidence they offer.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in *Nicaea* I made little use of liturgical materials. This is, in part, because of my own sense that scholars have tended to take an overly romantic and idealistic view of the relationship between theological development and liturgical practice. In fact, we frequently observe a *lex credendi, lex orandi* that renders such texts very complex when we seek to use them in our accounts. At the same time, while we have materials that can be used to demonstrate the interrelationship between pro-Nicene theologies and their liturgical practice (and in any second edition these would have to be included in Chapters 11–13), we have little that can be dated with sufficient certitude to show developments over the course of the fourth century.

<sup>4</sup> By “grammatical” I refer to the reading practices that adapt or simply copy those one would have learned at the hand of the *grammatikos* in the late antique educational context. See Ayres, *Nicaea*, 31–37.

<sup>5</sup> See *Journal of Theological Studies* 56 (2005) 669–70 (Behr), 670–75 (Ayres).

<sup>6</sup> In the book on which I am now working, *The Giver of Life: The Rise of the Spirit 350–400*, I will make much more extensive use of them.

# Response to Ayres: The Legacies of Nicaea, East and West

John Behr

*St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary*

In his work, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, Lewis Ayres raises a number of issues important to the discipline of theology.<sup>1</sup> The first is simply the difficulty of studying the past, especially the fourth century, one of the key periods in the formation of Christian theology. Reading texts from fifteen hundred years ago is sufficiently challenging, but these texts are set in a very complex history (or histories) of theological, social and imperial controversies and transitions. Then there is the task of relating the study of historical theology to modern systematic theology, knowing that simply retelling the history more thoroughly will not solve or resolve modern issues, for they have their own complicated genealogy. There is also the need to be aware of the involvement of different exegetical practices and presuppositions—then and now—in all of this. Finally, and most broadly or ecumenically, there are the implications that such work now has for dialogue between “Western” and “Eastern” trinitarian theology, and the questionable usefulness of such categories. That Ayres has remained sensitive to these, and other, dimensions of difficulty, while also engaging with a substantial body of literature, numerous primary texts, and diverse secondary texts (if that is still a useful distinction) makes his work both challenging and significant.

Following Michel Barnes, as well as in the work they did together, Ayres has done much to deconstruct the oppositional model of trinitarian theology, usually traced back to Théodore de Régnon, which dominated so much of twentieth-century theological scholarship, both historical and systematic. This caricature sets the “Cappadocian East” (as moving from the three to the one) in opposition to the “Augustinian West” (moving from the one to the three); posits that distinct

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

analogies illustrate these differences (the “social” and the “psychological,” respectively); and then focuses on the writings which deploy these analogies as the supposedly “classic texts” of their respective traditions, thereby establishing the thesis as a proven fact.

The attempt of Barnes and Ayres to correct this misconception is certainly very commendable and welcome, as is much else in their work. However, I would ask whether Ayres’s account of what he revealingly refers to as “a fully pro-Nicene theology”<sup>2</sup> is indeed an adequate description of what Athanasius and the Cappadocians, in particular (distinctive as they were) were working towards, or whether it constitutes an appropriation of what they were doing by an Augustinian tradition of theology mediated through the categories of contemporary systematics.<sup>3</sup> And, if the latter, does this point to a difference of approach more profound than the one posited by de Régnon? Is it possible that Ayres’s opposition—as much as it was utilized by twentieth-century Orthodox theologians and apologists—is really an opposition as construed from within a “Western” framework, where the issue is the relation between the one and the three, so that the “Eastern” position, as it would be articulated by its proponents, is not even on the horizon? If this is the case, then the de Régnon paradigm has been removed, not in order to allow these diverse writers to appear in their distinctiveness (before we begin to categorize them as old-, neo-, or pro-Nicene), but rather to subsume their distinct voices within a particular (and particularly totalizing) discourse.

This is, I realize, a serious charge. But a few apparently minor points will, I think, make the case. They will do so all the more clearly on account of their being apparently trivial, as such examples often reveal our own unexamined presuppositions most acutely. The first concerns the term “God.” It goes without saying that every serious student of theology should pay scrupulous attention to the way in which this term is used. That the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, even in Greek translation, use this term precisely was already noted by Philo: when used with an article (ὁ θεός) it refers to the One who alone is God; when used without an article it has a more general meaning.<sup>4</sup> Origen points out the same feature regarding the writings of New Testament,<sup>5</sup> and this has been noted by many writers, systematic theologians, and scriptural scholars since.<sup>6</sup> With a few exceptions, where it is also used of Jesus (though always on the prior assertion that he is Son of God), the term “God” with

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Ayres, *Nicaea*, 207, 245; cf. 230.

<sup>3</sup> I emphasize “as mediated through the categories of contemporary systematics,” because it is not clear to me that Augustine himself was necessarily working in this direction either, even though the contemporary discipline of systematics owes much to him.

<sup>4</sup> *On Dreams* 1.229.

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on John* 2.17.

<sup>6</sup> Two classic texts from diverse writers are: Karl Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament,” in *God, Christ, Mary and Grace* (trans. C. Ernst; Theological Investigations, vol. 1; Baltimore: Helicon, 1965) 79–148; and R. E. Brown, “Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?” in *Jesus God and Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967) 1–38.

an article is reserved for the one God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ. This usage is deeply ingrained in the fourth-century creeds; with very few exceptions, whatever else they may say, they assert: I believe in one God, the Father . . . and in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . and in one Holy Spirit (or something very similar). Jesus Christ is the Son *of God*, and, therefore, other than “the only true God” (John 17:3); the question in the fourth century was whether he could be affirmed to be as divine as the Father, and so also be called upon as ὁ θεός, as he occasionally is in Scripture. The same question was asked of the Spirit, and Gregory Nazianzen answered in the affirmative despite the absence of any scriptural precedent, though this, to his chagrin, did not make it into the Creed of Constantinople.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, for whatever reason, we have become so accustomed to speaking of “the triune God” or “the trinitarian God”—the one God who is three—that we find it difficult not to think of the Trinity whenever we read the word “God.” So, when expounding the theology of Athanasius or one of the Cappadocians in his book, Ayres frequently, and without comment, refers to “the triune God” or “trinitarian God,” despite the fact that these terms are nowhere to be found in their writings (and the former cannot even be rendered in Greek). These theological formulations not only affect his words about their works, introducing unspoken assumptions about what they are talking about, but also filter his rendering of their words themselves. For instance, Ayres quotes a passage from an oration of Gregory Nazianzen as follows:

A perfect Trinity consisting of three perfects (Τριάδα τελείαν ἐκ τελείων τριῶν), we must abandon the concept of a monad for the sake of plenitude (διὰ το πλούσιον), and go beyond a dyad (for God is beyond the duality of matter and form which constitutes material things), and we must define God as a Trinity for the sake of completeness (διὰ τὸ τέλειον).<sup>8</sup>

This is certainly a difficult passage to translate, and it can be done in various ways. But the passage does not include the word “God” in the original Greek, nor does it have us “defining” God (as if Gregory would have had such audacity), and certainly not “as a Trinity.” In the year before Ayres’s book appeared, the first English

<sup>7</sup> It is possible, though not provable, that this is the basis for the designation of the Evangelist John and Gregory Nazianzen as “theologians,” for it is in the Gospel of John (20:28) that Jesus is most clearly affirmed to be ὁ θεός and Gregory alone affirms this of the Spirit (notwithstanding his claim that Basil was also willing to affirm this in private). The same may be true of Symeon the New Theologian, for his dramatic reversal of the biblical affirmation that “God is Light” (1 John 1:5); approaching the divine Light, he asks, “My God, is it you?” and hears the reply, “Yes, I am God who became man for your sake and behold I have made you, as you see, and will make you into a god” (*Ethical Discourse* 5.13–16). In this case, Christian theology is not simply “words about God,” speaking about him as we might do, for example, of animals in the discipline of zoology, subjecting them to our investigation; it is rather the affirmation or the confession that the Christ proclaimed by the apostles in accordance with the Scriptures is indeed *what* (not *who*) it is to be God, true God of true God, and that this confession is made possible only in and through the Spirit.

<sup>8</sup> *Oratio in laudem Basilii* (*Or. Bas.*) 23.8; cited in Ayres, *Nicaea*, 245, with these Greek words.

translation of this oration was published, which renders the passage (given here more fully, with the key phrase in Greek) as follows:

They are one in their separation and separate in their conjunction, even if this is a paradoxical statement; revered no less for their mutual relationship than when they are thought of and taken individually; a perfect Trinity of three perfect entities; a monad taking its impetus from its superabundance, a dyad transcended (that is, it goes beyond the form and matter of which bodies consist), a triad defined by its perfection (Τριάδος δὲ ὀρίσθεις διὰ τὸ τέλειον) since it is the first to transcend the synthesis of duality in order that the Godhead might not be constricted or diffused without limit, for constriction bespeaks an absence of generosity; diffusion, an absence of order. The one is thoroughly Judaic; the other, Greek and polytheistic.<sup>9</sup>

The use of the passive, “is defined,” is vital, reflecting Gregory’s theological approach more generally, that of contemplating the revelation of God in Christ by the Spirit, rather than subjecting the being of God to our limited human activity of thinking and defining, and certainly not “defining God as Trinity.” Gregory was and still is regarded as one of the greatest rhetoricians—word-smiths—of the fourth century; he uses his words with care. If we are to begin to hear what he has to say, then we must pay utmost attention to how he uses his words, rather than simply hearing our own voice projected onto him.

A similar point could be made with regard to our tendency to speak of “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” While this might be possible in Latin (given the ambiguity resulting from the absence of an article), it does not reflect the patterns of fourth-century Greek writers, if this formulation is even possible in their language. The more usual idiom would be to speak of ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ (“the God and Father”), the Son of God, or the Word of God (or equally ὁ θεὸς λόγος—not “God the Word” but “the God-Word”), and the Spirit of God. In other words, the referent for the term “God” remains clear each time: the one of whom Jesus is the Son and Word, as fully divine as the Father so that he can also be called upon as God, “true God of true God,” and likewise the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit *of God*, and, as the one received through Christ, the Spirit of Christ (following the language patterns of Scripture)—Christ, whose work, pro-Nicenes hold, reveals him as fully divine (though not called “God” by Scripture). To speak of “the triune” or “trinitarian God,” the one God who is three, Father, Son and Spirit, sounds not only odd, but distinctly modalist.

The point made here also speaks to the liturgical and hymnographic tradition. The Eastern Anaphoras address in the second person singular—God, that is, the Father—though always together with his Son and Holy Spirit: “For Thou art God, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit” (Liturgy of St

<sup>9</sup> *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations* [Or. Bas. 23.8] (trans. M. Vinson; *The Fathers of the Church* 107; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003) 137.



John Chrysostom). Later Eastern hymnography occasionally speaks of a “triadic divinity” or “tri-hypostatic divinity,” using the abstract noun, but does not, so far as I am aware, ever refer to a “triadic” or “triune” *God*.<sup>10</sup> There is, then, a very real sense in which our distinct ecclesial traditions have given us different ears to hear the texts of antiquity differently.

I am not sure that the significance of this difference has been satisfactorily acknowledged, or that it has even registered. To describe this objection as a canard or red herring proves the point that its full force has not been heard! The intention here is not to reinscribe de Régnon’s opposition. But by pointing out this apparently minor question (how the word “God” is used), I do mean to suggest that there may well be a more fundamental difference, not between a Greek East and a Latin West, but between—on the one hand, the more archaic use of the word “God,” following Scripture and preserved into the fourth century and thereafter in the East (at least until the late Byzantine period, but still to this day in its hymnography), and—on the other hand, an approach to theology that sees its primary task as “defining God as Trinity.” Whether God as Trinity originates in the West with Augustine or not, certainly now it characterizes the language of Western theological discourse and, because of its familiarity, becomes an unexamined presupposition in the activity of reading others.

This presupposition is explicitly acknowledged by Ayres, who states that one of the main goals of his work is to set out “an account of pro-Nicene Trinitarianism in which Greek, Latin and Syriac speakers shared a set of fundamental ‘strategies’ in their trinitarian theologies.”<sup>11</sup> I have argued that this goal is flawed, inasmuch as it presumes that this—“trinitarianism”—is indeed what his subjects were doing. This primary “strategy,” moreover, is inseparable for Ayres from two others: the first is a “series of Christological assumptions” (that “the Word is a co-equal person in the indivisible Godhead”); the second, a “series of assumptions about the nature of human purification and spiritual progress . . . which shapes pro-Nicene scriptural exegesis.” That these two other “strategies” might be handled by Ayres in a similarly problematic manner is suggested by his treatment of passages from Gregory’s *Orations* 29 and 30. It is simply not accurate to say that Gregory attributes scriptural material “either to the pre-incarnate Word or to the incarnate Word.”<sup>12</sup> In the passages to which this statement refers, Gregory does not speak of the “pre-incarnate Word” (another phrase common in modern theological dis-

<sup>10</sup> Only much later do terms such as “the trihypostatic God” come to be used; occasionally in the tenth-eleventh century, for instance in Symeon the New Theologian, and then with much greater regularity in the thirteenth-fourteenth century onwards, in Gregory Palamas, Gregory Acindynus, Philotheus Coccinus. Whether this was influenced by the Greek translation of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is a fascinating, and unexplored, topic. Regardless of cause, by this time the main corpus of hymnography, which is used to this day, had largely been composed, so that such phrases never became the liturgical idiom in Eastern Orthodoxy.

<sup>11</sup> See Ayres, 141, above.

<sup>12</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 332.

course, but which I have yet to find in the writings of the Cappadocians). Rather, Gregory differentiates between how Scripture speaks of Christ as divine and human, a distinction between what is spoken of him by nature and what belongs to what he has done “economically,” with the following important qualifications: first, that it is one and the same Christ that is being spoken of in both ways, and second, that our knowledge of Christ’s divinity derives from the works that he has done as human (when interpreted, in the light of the Passion, through the Scriptures)—that is, that “theology” is grounded in the “economy.” Whether in my own work, as Ayres suggests, I restrict, in some kind of “Barthian” manner,<sup>13</sup> the scope of theological discourse appropriately or inappropriately, is not the issue; what Gregory himself says or does not say is. If I am right in my characterization of Gregory’s point, then our question must be: what does *he* understand the task of theology to be, and how does *he* understand its workings?

As important as these points are (regarding the use of the term “God” and how Scripture speaks about Christ, tied in as they are with the relation between theology and economy), as I have drawn them out they indicate, I suspect, the root cause of my unease with Ayres’s work: that it operates at a level removed from a close analysis of the history of the controversy and the texts that we have remaining from that period. Ayres does not overly concern himself with the details of the controversy. For example, the outbreak of the conflict between Arius and Alexander is simply said to have occurred “in AD 318 (but maybe as late as 322),”<sup>14</sup> with a footnote referencing Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, but no mention of the scholarly debate regarding the date, nor the implications that either date might have for identifying the historical context of crucial documents and so for understanding the development of the key players in the debate and the debate itself.

With regard to theological exposition (for that is the concern we share, though the same point could be made regarding other concerns, such as the social setting in which these texts were written), rather than beginning with the surviving texts, and through a close analysis of these expounding the theological vision they contain and the controversies in which their authors were engaged, Ayres expounds the “pro-Nicene strategies” that he discerns and considers of importance. Indeed, as Khaled Anatolios observes elsewhere in this issue,<sup>15</sup> the only complete text that Ayres analyzes, Gregory of Nyssa’s *Ad Ablabium*, is the very one he tells us we should no longer privilege in presentation of his theology! Now, it is certainly not possible to present each and every text written during the course of the fourth century. But it simply will not do to focus on sections from texts where the discussion seems to be pertinent to the theological locus that we have decided to treat, without at least some consideration of the text as a whole—its genre, scope, argument, etc.—and how it holds together for the author on his own terms as these are expressed by

<sup>13</sup> See Ayres’s comments, below, 169 n. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 15–16.

<sup>15</sup> See Anatolios, below, 153–58, at 156.

the texts themselves. “Trinitarianism” may well be a category in our theological discourse, but is it in that of the fourth-century writers? If there is one thing that we should have learned from historical and philosophical scholarship in recent decades, it would be that it is not necessarily the case that elements of a discourse are static and always present; that to understand a discourse we must listen to its own idiom, with its own nodal points, rather than seeking out what we think are analogues to the idioms of our own discourse. We cannot presume that our terms and phrases (e.g., “triune God”) are adequate to describe what the fourth-century writers are talking about. A clear example of this is Athanasius’s work *On the Incarnation*, which was abysmally treated by R. P. C. Hanson in his *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, in which Hanson laments that “his doctrine of the Incarnation has almost swallowed up any doctrine of the atonement, has rendered it unnecessary,” yet which Khaled Anatolios pointed out is in fact written specifically as an apology for the cross, a fact which is obscured if we presume we already know what Athanasius meant by “incarnation” before even reading the work.<sup>16</sup>

Quite reasonably, Ayres explicitly states that he does not intend to offer a complete portrait of each figure;<sup>17</sup> this is not the goal of his work, nor need it be. But it is certainly necessary to present how the theological outlook of each of our subjects holds together, before we can even begin to analyze the various alignments that were made (or that we see as being made) during the course of the fourth century. Ayres notes that others have suggested that the fourth-century debates were “not ‘simply’ Christological or ‘simply’ Trinitarian,” and recommends that “it would be far better simply to avoid the categories.”<sup>18</sup> Yet it is precisely a version of “trinitarianism” (and its accompanying “strategies”) that is the driving concern of his work: there is almost no discussion about “incarnation” and the only mention I found of the crucifixion was a passing comment noting that the “pro-Nicenes” take the soul’s formation as effected by “the action of Christ as Incarnate (and crucified, resurrected and ascended) Word.”<sup>19</sup> It is certainly possible that Athanasius’s *On the Incarnation* was not as influential in the fourth century as we might have thought,<sup>20</sup> but that it is a vital part of Athanasius’s theology can hardly be denied.

One of Ayres’s most damning criticisms of modern systematic theology is that it utilizes the results of the early theological controversies without respecting the legitimacy of the theological method that produced these dogmas. But does not the same occur when we utilize aspects of our subjects’ works as if they were detachable dogmas, corresponding to the categories of our own theological outlook? It seems to me that Ayres’s analysis of the fourth century is more indebted to the categories,

<sup>16</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy*, 318–381 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 450; K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 218.

<sup>17</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 304–5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

the *theological loci*, of contemporary systematics (whatever their genealogy may be), than his critique of this discipline might lead him and us to suppose, and, more importantly, that this unexamined indebtedness leads him to, if not misrepresentation, then at least a lopsided picture.

If there is harsh criticism in my words, it reflects the challenge that Ayres's book raises and, thereby, confirms its significance.

# Yes and No: Reflections on Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*

Khaled Anatolios

*Weston Jesuit School of Theology*

Lewis Ayres's *Nicaea and its Legacy* has created a stir among historians of Christian doctrine since its publication.<sup>1</sup> Its relation to the previously existing body of scholarship on fourth-century trinitarian theology is one of both consolidation and provocation. Ayres accomplishes a prodigious work of consolidation by synthesizing much of the groundbreaking scholarship that has lately transpired in the study of fourth-century trinitarian debates, while simultaneously making his own contributions toward retelling the narrative of these debates. Following Hanson, Simonetti, Barnes, and others,<sup>2</sup> Ayres rejects a simplistic division between more or less uniform camps of Nicene and "Arian" theologies. Somewhat paradoxically, however, his distinctive contribution to this retelling is to insist on a fundamental unity between pro-Nicene camps in both the Greek and Latin traditions. While Ayres makes this point with forceful persuasion, the point itself is not controversial among patristic scholars. The assertion of a substantive rift between Eastern and Western trinitarian theologies has not held much sway within this milieu; it is not found in either Hanson or Simonetti, for instance, and its genealogy, traced back to the figure of de Régnon, has been famously exposed by Michel Barnes.<sup>3</sup> What is provocative, however, is Ayres's insistence that there existed a geographically consistent "pro-Nicene" culture in both East and West that was also internally

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Manlio Simonetti, *La Crisi Ariana nel IV secolo* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 11; Rome: Augustinianum, 1975); Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381 AD* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988); Michel René Barnes, "The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones; New York: Routledge, 1998) 47–67.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *AugStud* 26 (1995) 51–79.

consistent as a superior construal of the “plain sense” of canonical Scripture. More provocative still is Ayres’s polemical engagement, in the concluding chapter of his work, with modern systematic theology. Here, Ayres offers a sweeping dismissal of modern trinitarian theology as wallowing in a Hegelian wasteland, in bondage to methodological commitments that are antithetical to “pro-Nicene culture,” with no hope of a redeeming synthesis in sight. The only way forward is first to return to an integration of historical and systematic theology, based on a reappropriation of the basic tenets of pro-Nicene culture.

It is hardly surprising that a work that represents as much integration and provocation as this one should stimulate both sympathy and critique, even—like the fourth-century debates themselves—alliances and counteralliances. Ayres’s work consistently strives for a nuanced presentation of the complexities within these fourth-century alliances and parties. In line with this principle, I see my own response to Ayres’s work not as unequivocal agreement or disagreement, but rather, first of all, one of gratitude for his undeniable contribution to the current discussion and then as a posture which I would describe as critical solidarity. As an expression of this stance of critical solidarity, I would like to draw attention to three structural themes in Ayres’s work. In each case, I find myself sympathetic to the principle espoused by Ayres but critical of his manner of implementing—or, his failure to sufficiently implement—that principle. These themes are: 1) the notion of a pro-Nicene culture; 2) the exegetical character of the fourth-century doctrinal debates; and 3) the need for a more thorough integration of the historical and systematic tasks in theological discourse.

### ■ Pro-Nicene Culture

In constructing his conception of a “pro-Nicene culture,” Ayres grounds the various doctrinal formulae of pro-Nicene theologians in a doctrinal synthesis inclusive of various aspects of Christian experience: religious epistemology, cosmology, a way of reading the Scriptures, an account of the human’s transformation in Christ, etc. In circumscribing “pro-Nicene culture” within this intra-Christian framework, Ayres does not analyze the role of currents in the wider culture in the formation of competing Christian cultures. However, I in fact agree with Ayres that, while such discussion can be a useful supplement to theological explanation, we may legitimately refrain from making it the primary mode of analysis. Where a theological position appears intelligible in terms of internal criteria (e.g., debates over scriptural interpretation), its intelligibility may be analyzed and articulated on its own terms. Such an account should always be open to supplementation by studies that emphasize overlapping sociocultural influences. Nevertheless, to the degree that such influences are actually assimilated in Christian terms, the task of analyzing the intelligibility of that assimilation remains valid, without any prejudice against the validity of other complementary tasks.

Given the validity of attempting a reading of pro-Nicene culture “from within,” I would offer two more justifications for the appeal to a doctrinally synthetic presentation of pro-Nicene theology. First, it is simply a basic hermeneutical rule, from Hellenistic literary theory to modern criticism, that the meaning of parts of a text are discerned through a view of the whole. By extension, the meaning of a given theologian’s position with regard to a specific aspect of doctrine becomes intelligible through reference to the whole of his or her theological vision. Secondly, in the particular case of trinitarian theology, where the subject matter is conceded to be ineffable, it is all the more important to grasp the whole vision of a given theologian in order to explain his or her trinitarian position. It is one thing to refine our descriptive nomenclature for describing various conceptions of the relation between Father and Son, but it is another really to explain why Athanasius and Basil, for example, were committed to saying that the Son was equal to the Father, and that Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Eunomius were not. Only reference to the whole vision of a given theologian can even begin to offer such an explanation. This is why I welcome Ayres’s efforts to connect pro-Nicene doctrine with the wider theological frameworks, or cultures, which inform them.

My central concern in this regard, however, is that what would be a very sound methodological principle if applied consistently to the narrative of the trinitarian controversies remains rather extrinsic to that narrative in Ayres’s work. So, first we have the story of the different trends and trajectories, manifesting a fairly narrow preoccupation with differing accounts of the relation between Father and Son, and then, separately and altogether too briefly, we have some examples of the implications of the various pro-Nicene positions for other aspects of Christian experience.<sup>4</sup> The only “culture” ultimately depicted is what Ayres calls the pro-Nicene culture in its final moment of triumph. We do not get a dramatic presentation of the formation of that culture through the earlier stages of the fourth-century debates; we do not get much of a sense of competing cultures; and, for the most part, we do not even see how pro-Nicene culture, defined generally by a mosaic of references to different figures, is particularized in its wholeness in the thought of individual figures. The relative lack of attention to Athanasius’s theology as a whole, understood on its own terms, is symptomatic of this problem. Ayres concedes that “Athanasius already prefigures key elements of later pro-Nicene theologies,”<sup>5</sup> but, inasmuch as he presumably does not quite make the grade, we are not granted an exposition of Athanasius’s own theological culture but rather an assessment of how he falls short of later pro-Nicene standards of tri-unity. I contend, however, that Athanasius’s significance has much to do precisely with the fact that he espoused so many of the elements of “pro-Nicene culture” without a

<sup>4</sup> This account is given in Chapters 11–13 (273–343), where Ayres identifies the fundamental tenets of a pro-Nicene culture in terms of three strategies: “speaking of unity and diversity in the Trinity”; “christology and cosmology”; and “anthropology, epistemology, and the reading of Scripture.”

<sup>5</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 117.

fully developed vocabulary for tri-unity. A close study of Athanasius is invaluable precisely because it demonstrates that the constitutive elements of pro-Nicene theology are not reducible to terminology.

I worry that Ayres's tendency to marginalize Athanasius is indicative of the degree to which his narrative is still beholden to a modified version of the word-study approach to doctrinal development: we know what the right answer is—"three persons in one nature"—so we look back to see how close different people come to this answer. Only once we get to the correct formulation do we look more closely at the whole theological visions of those who have articulated it. But, surprisingly, even when we do get to the "right answer," the focus is still largely restricted to the terminology, concepts, and analogical references relating to unity and diversity, rather than on the entirety of the theological visions that undergird a commitment to pro-Nicene trinitarian doctrine. Ayres's section "Understanding Pro-Nicene Theology" offers extended treatments of Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine as Eastern and Western exemplars, respectively, of pro-Nicene theology. However, in both cases, the treatment still all too narrowly restricts itself to the terminology of unity and diversity, as is evident from the emphasis on *Ad Ablabium* in the chapter on Gregory and on Books V–VII of *De Trinitate* in the chapter on Augustine. It is true that the chapters on Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine are preceded by Ayres's exposition of some general features of pro-Nicene theology; but Ayres misses his chance to particularize and integrate these features of pro-Nicene theology in the context of the thought of the two figures that he has selected as exemplary of that theology, understood precisely as a "culture." In making this criticism, my intent is not to subject Ayres to an impossibly perfectionist standard by which any omission is judged an indication of failure. Rather, I consider the fundamental question to concern the location of the intelligibility of trinitarian doctrine. Does this intelligibility reside in mere categorizations of ways of conceptualizing and articulating divine tri-unity, or in a whole vision of Christian life? If one holds to the latter, then an attempt must be made, however flawed and incomplete, to show concretely how the trinitarian theologies of particular figures arose out of such a vision.

### ■ Pro-Nicene Trinitarian Exegesis

The second area in which I find myself cheering for Ayres's theoretical commitments but conflicted about his manner of execution is his emphasis on the exegetical character of the fourth-century debates. I am sympathetic to his claim that the validity and intelligibility of pro-Nicene theology can be summed up by saying that it proved itself to have greater claim to the "plain sense" of Scripture, "the way the words run."<sup>6</sup> But aside from desiring a clearer presentation of what exactly he means by the plain sense, I am concerned that any purely formal definition would

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 38.



be incapable of sustaining Ayres's claim if that claim is not actually substantiated in the very telling of the story of the fourth-century debates. Here again, I lament the extrinsicality of Ayres's narrative to his assessment of its import. He tells us, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, of the exegetical character of the fourth-century debates, but he does not demonstrate it in the telling of the narrative. We have no significant comparisons between the exegetical theories and practice of pro-Nicene and non-Nicene theologians, nor of crucial controverted texts, such as Prov 8:22, nor of the exegetical construction of the main theological positions; the discussion of Gregory of Nazianzus does not grapple with the exegetical arguments of the *Theological Orations*; the treatment of Augustine's *On the Trinity* does not even mention the exegetical first four books! While I am already convinced that pro-Nicene trinitarianism has strong exegetical grounding, other readers might reasonably insist that such a claim be substantiated and not merely asserted.

In this regard, there is a telling passage in Ayres's discussion of pro-Nicene exegesis. He writes: "In most important ways pro-Nicene reading practices are simply those shared by virtually all Christian readers in the fourth century. The distinctive character of pro-Nicene exegesis is to be found in subtle twists given to common reading practices, and in links drawn between these reading practices and the principles of pro-Nicene trinitarianism."<sup>7</sup> Now, notwithstanding "the subtle twists," this seems to suggest that pro-Nicenes read Scriptures like everyone else in the fourth century except that they connect their reading to a pro-Nicene position. This begs the question: how does a pro-Nicene position arise, insofar as it was supposed to accord with the way the words of Scripture run? Is it the subtle twists, then, that actually make the difference? Ayres refers rather summarily to two such twists, which I agree are significant: "the pro-Nicene *skopos*" and "the complexity of scriptural semiotics."<sup>8</sup> The problem, however, is that he does not offer any concrete demonstrations of just how these twists differ from non-Nicene readings of Scripture, nor does he explicate these twists within his narration of the story of fourth-century theology. This again raises for me the specter of extrinsicality between the telling of the story and the conclusions drawn from that story. Finally, to recall my earlier comments, I find it ironic that these two all-important subtle twists can be demonstrated to be central to Athanasius's theological vision. Both of them find clear and explicit articulation in the *Orations against the Arians*, among other places.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 338–39.

<sup>9</sup> See my discussion of Athanasius's trinitarian exegesis in Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2004) 74–83; see also J. Ernest, "Athanasius of Alexandria: The Scope of Scripture in Polemical and Pastoral Context," *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993) 341–62.

## ■ Historical and Systematic Theology

I also find myself in fundamental sympathy with Ayres's insistence on the integration of the historical and systematic moments in current doctrinal theology. I fully agree that there is no authentic Christian systematic theology that is not at the same time historical. And I can empathize with Ayres's frustration in what amounts to a sound scolding of virtually the whole population of modern systematic theologians for their lack of deep engagement with the historical processes of doctrinal formation. But I am not sure that the extent and intensity of his denunciation is altogether fair and constructive. Indeed, one sometimes suspects an "eye for an eye" logic of resentment, rather than a modeling of the kind of sympathetic reading that Ayres wishes systematicians to give historians of doctrine. So, in one significant example, while he denounces the modern narrative of early Christian theology as beholden to Greek metaphysics, arguing for a distinction between "piecemeal adaptation"<sup>10</sup> of philosophical ideas and their alleged subversion of Christian doctrine, Ayres himself is not shy of tarring a broad range of modern theologians (Rahner, von Balthasar, Walter Kasper) with the brushes of Hegelianism and idealism. Unfortunately, this blanket judgment is not balanced by an attempt to construe their thought in its native wholeness.

Moreover, I believe it is not only systematicians who are to blame for the fragmentation of the historical and systematic tasks in theological discourse. If it is granted that systematicians do not know enough about the fourth century, it is also pertinent that historians of doctrine do not do enough to clarify the inner logic and internal connectedness of emergent doctrinal positions. Ayres's theoretical espousal of the project of analyzing a pro-Nicene culture is a move in precisely the right direction, but his propensity to lapse back into taxonomies of terminology and categorizations of tri-unity, more or less abstracted from the native theological landscapes that inform them, is less helpful to the cause.

At the beginning of these remarks, I identified my position in regard to Ayres's work as one of "critical solidarity." Indeed, I do not wish to have these criticisms annul my fundamental solidarity with some of his key principles and motivations, which I have identified. It is precisely for the sake of these principles (if indeed I construe them correctly) that I challenge Ayres to apply them more consistently. As he himself intimates, the story of doctrinal development will never be finally told this side of the *eschaton*. The best that can be hoped for is that one telling will enable a deeper one; certainly, Ayres's telling of this story, valuable as it is in itself, is also equally valuable in enabling further tellings. I am sure that he will continue to contribute considerably to this ongoing task.

<sup>10</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 391.

# A Response to the Critics of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*

Lewis Ayres  
*Emory University*

Let me turn in this “Response” to the concerns of those who have been unhappy with particular features of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*.<sup>1</sup> Although the bulk of my discussion will be taken up with the responses of Khaled Anatolios and John Behr, I want also to range a little more widely. For the most part, criticisms of my book *Nicaea* have stemmed as much from opposition to my overall attitude towards the task of historical theology as from opposition to my interpretation of particular episodes of the fourth century.<sup>2</sup> A range of related questions focuses on the relationship between the good practice of theology and the implications of the forms of modern historical consciousness that I have clearly found persuasive. The three critics that I engage here all seem to me to be pushing in directions that (consciously or unconsciously) inappropriately restrict the scope and character of theological—and particularly of historical theological—investigation. I must confess at the beginning of this discussion that I assumed the majority of negative responses to my project as a whole (as opposed to negative responses to particular sections of the argument) would come from what might be termed the theological “left”: those who are convinced by some of the fundamental lines of post-Enlightenment and recent liberal critique of classical Christian tradition. It has, however, been fascinating to see other critics emerge from what might perhaps be termed the theological “right”: those sympathetic to modern attempts to retrieve the centrality of classical

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Although I speak of “historical” theology it should be noted that one of my arguments in the last chapter of *Nicaea* is that the historical theologian has no need of being supplemented by a separate discipline called “systematic” theology. In so arguing, I do not seek to deny the need for a constant appropriation of classical Christian doctrines but to remove that appropriation from the discipline of “systematics.”

Christian texts, theologians, and exegetical methods. Both forms of critique demand a response.<sup>3</sup>

## ■ From the Left Bank

In a very helpful and generous response to *Nicaea* at the 2006 meeting of the North American Patristics Society, Rebecca Lyman argued that my approach represented a return to the scholarly approaches of the era before the last few decades' reconsideration of the fourth-century controversies. She indicated that by this she meant that my study did not devote much space to considering the social world within which these controversies undoubtedly occurred and thus missed the opportunity to highlight some of the most fundamental factors driving the debate. The comment was fascinating, yet puzzling. The puzzlement occurred because of my understanding that most of the main figures in that scholarly revival—figures such as Maurice Wiles—engaged in close study of theological texts in ways I have always understood as very similar to my own.

Only afterward, in reflection on her recent work, did I see the particular connections that Lyman was drawing. In a series of recently published essays, Lyman argues that intra-Christian doctrinal controversy (especially the emerging concern for “right belief” in the second century) is one example of long-running debates about unity within “Hellenic” tradition. In a piece published in the *Anglican Theological Review* in 2002, Lyman offers a brief characterization of the fourth century and its modern legacy which pursues a similar argument.<sup>4</sup> The very drive towards “orthodoxy,” she argues, reflects a cultural context in which “platonic” belief in the superiority of unity takes concrete form through the emerging desire for the institutional unity apparent in Roman political and ecclesiastical leaders. Yet, at the same time, the very character of that debate both masks and encourages an unstable “hybridity” within which negotiation and debate are necessary “to maintain the transcendent authenticity and cultural universality of the hybrid itself.”<sup>5</sup>

Lyman is not only arguing that a particular development in theological orthodoxy was the result of those with political power (perhaps with little understanding of or interest in Christian belief) forcing positions on Christians rather than the result of participants in the controversy engaging in internal polemic and debate over the persuasiveness of a particular idea. Such arguments are frequently offered in more or less sophisticated forms and must, of course, be treated on a case-by-case

<sup>3</sup> “Right” and “left” here are used somewhat tongue in cheek: I am aware that they have little utility if taken to identify the positions of critics as a whole. The presence of postliberal voices whose ecclesial and secular politics draw much from the secular left even as they are part of a move against philosophical liberalism in theology renders the distinction problematic. But as a heuristic for describing two trends towards the Christian tradition, the pair of terms is still, I hope, serviceable. Adopting the rhetoric of the “center” for one’s own position is of course not the subtlest of polemical techniques, but it is hard to resist!

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Lyman, “Natural Resources: Tradition without Orthodoxy,” *ATHR* 84 (2002) 67–80.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy,” *JECS* 11 (2003) 209–22, at 221.

basis. As long as such a style of argumentation does not become a global hypothesis about early Christian belief (in which case it would seem to require almost endless justification at each step!), it is one that may be adopted by interpreters with a whole range of degrees of interest in theology.<sup>6</sup> Lyman's argument makes a much more sophisticated claim, namely, that theological debates are best interpreted through an awareness of why the larger culture finds particular forms of argument and solution to be persuasive. Nor is she claiming—along the lines proposed by some social historians—that Christian debates over orthodoxy are epiphenomenal to more fundamental discourses of social power. Rather, she wants to see early Christian theology as a very specific appropriation of this wider cultural debate.<sup>7</sup>

I do not dispute the importance of Lyman's work. Along with (and partially in the wake of) the now classic Alain LeBoulluec's *La Notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe-IIIe siècles*,<sup>8</sup> Lyman's account opens a number of important avenues for further exploration. Yet, I want to make one observation and highlight three areas of concern. In her "Tradition Without Orthodoxy," Lyman appears to deduce from her identification of the fourth-century controversies as an example of this cultural wider debate that modern Christians should feel less bound by the results of those controversies, even as they continue to value the Christian tradition. Thus, when she reflects on the significance of her historical work for modern Christian thought, we see at least a parallel between her approach and that of Maurice Wiles, despite their rather different scholarly concerns. For both, uncovering the historical and cultural contingency of early Christian belief raises the possibility of a modern Christianity willing to see itself in some fairly significant discontinuities with that early belief.

My first concern focuses not on the usefulness of exploring the cultural debates and contexts on which Lyman has recently worked per se, but on how we understand the explanatory power of such work. In the first place, to what extent do we use the uncovering of these discourses to replace explanations shaped around exegetical dispute or other "internal" theological concerns rather than to supplement our understanding of the very character of theological argument? My sense is that, while Lyman's arguments provide much that helps with a great deal of supplementation, and that this is mostly her own intention, at times (especially when the relationship between ancient and modern Christian belief is under consideration) the function of replacement moves inappropriately to the forefront.<sup>9</sup> Exploration of these cultural

<sup>6</sup> I, for instance, adopt one version of this style of interpretation when examining the effects of Constantius's attempt to find a creedal solution to the controversies in 359–360; see Ayres, *Nicaea*, 157–68.

<sup>7</sup> There are some interesting parallels and significant divergences between Lyman's account and that of George R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of Its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> 2 vols.; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> I distinguish these two in answer to a very helpful response from Lyman to an earlier draft of this paper.

contexts most certainly provides important background to the character and shape of early Christian doctrinal debate, and some version of these concerns was an ingredient in the decisions that particular figures and councils made. In this sense, understanding these cultural debates is parallel to understanding the methods of exegesis and philosophical inquiry that shaped the argument we study, and so these wider investigations should supplement and deepen our attention to the particular arguments offered, defended, and refuted in the course of debate. My suspicion is that at times, however, the uncovering of these cultural debates about unity has further significant consequences. The locating of a given theological debate within a particular social and cultural context, no longer our own, is taken as a reason for suggesting that modern Christians move beyond the theological conclusions that resulted from debates which occurred within those particular contexts. Such a step seems to me to demand its own theoretical and theological argument (one concerned with questions of pneumatology and ecclesiology—and to speak of these is to speak also of one's theology of history—as well as with questions of the relationship between faith and culture).<sup>10</sup>

My second concern focuses on the questions that one can raise about the relationship between Christian discourse and the Hellenic discourse of orthodoxy that Lyman traces. She has focused on the second and fourth centuries as the period within which this Hellenic discourse shapes the structure of intra-Christian argument, but to what extent is that same discourse also part of the New Testament (and specifically Pauline) context, and thus intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the foundations of Christianity? To what extent did the theological debates from the second to the fourth centuries themselves shape cultural debates about unity within Hellenism, such that we could argue that these views of unity became persuasive on theological grounds? How do we see the interrelationship between Christian adaptations of these cultural debates and the development of Christian techniques for reading the text of Scripture as a whole? That is, in what ways are Christian notions of unity in theological discourse dependent on particular notions of what it means to be a scriptural tradition? To what extent must a tradition constituted by constant negotiation be understood as necessarily unstable in all fundamental doctrinal areas and thus as pointing to the need for a constant reformation as the best continuation of that tradition?<sup>11</sup> These questions follow from Lyman's work so far,

<sup>10</sup> Without such a defense such arguments appear to me to be open to a fairly standard critique of the English-speaking liberal theological tradition's approach to the history of Christian thought: far too much reliance is placed on the necessary consequences of modern historical uncovering of debate and ambiguity. My concerns in this regard are at least parallel to those raised by Rowan Williams in his "Doctrinal Criticism: Some Questions," in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (ed. Sarah Coakley and David Pailin; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 239–64.

<sup>11</sup> It seems to be the case that much could fruitfully be gained here by a deeper dialogue between the advocates of Christian "hybridity" and Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of arguments as constitutive of tradition.

but push further in asking how far Christianity's adoption of Roman and Hellenic debates about orthodoxy involved the shaping of a clear theological rationale for that adoption. The significance of these questions here lies in the manner in which they might undercut the idea that such notions of ideal cultural unity are inevitably "platonic" (and inevitably masking of their own instability) and thus not intrinsic to Christian thought (as Lyman seems to suggest). To push in this direction either makes more persuasive the liberal theological argument that we should not feel bound to the results of such debates, or (as I would argue) it forces on us a host of questions about the extent to which the enterprise of Christian theology (at least when it is concerned with the fundamental articles of faith) necessarily involves a growing familiarity with the cultures within which those beliefs were formed and most significantly articulated.<sup>12</sup>

My third area of concern further focuses on how we understand the theological consequences of modern critical historical investigation. I agree with Lyman that modern historical narration undermines both a narrative that alleges heresy to be nothing other than a deviation from unchanging orthodoxy, and one that admits development, but claims to be able to demonstrate a continuity that all who examine the evidence must admit. Nevertheless, the provisional claims of the historian are true for us all: we are also at a loss to demonstrate a lack of fundamental continuity in Christian belief despite the realities of development. It was against the assumption of this understanding of historical scholarship's abilities and lack of abilities that in the last chapter of *Nicaea* I argued that we may see it as of the very essence of appropriate faith in the Christian tradition that we must seek to narrate the continuity of Christian faith even as we recognize the provisionality of such narrations. But this, I suggest, may be envisaged as a task for the Christian scholar not solely out of historical necessity, but because of the theological gain represented by such an assumption. Theologically, it should not surprise us that such a narrative seems to be a possibility and yet one that is constantly beyond us; it is beyond us, perhaps, as an invitation to read the presence of the Spirit in ecclesial history. The fine line that one must walk to maintain this balance is probably better understood through a phenomenological description of the attitudes of the one who maintains it, rather than by focusing solely on theoretical justification. Thus while I am arguing here that historical theologians—especially in the current context of deep divides over how one may relate historical treatment of early Christianity to modern Christian belief—must articulate more directly their implicit theologies of history, I am also suggesting that it is particularly important to bear in mind the epistemological consequences of one's fundamental understanding of history. What attitudes towards historical investigation and analysis are most concomitant with a given theology of history?

<sup>12</sup> It is with these questions that ch. 16 of Ayres, *Nicaea* is partly concerned. My argument there is still, however, inchoate and I intend to return to it in the future.

## ■ From the Right Bank

Let me now turn to those on what I termed the theological “right.” During the discussion at Harvard, Khaled Anatolios pushed me on the consequences of my treatment of theological influence. For Anatolios my historicizing approach to the fourth century—my tendency to restrict the influence of some figures (particularly Athanasius) whom older narratives made central, and my tendency to discuss only one facet of a thinker’s work rather than offering a rounded picture of the whole of that thinker’s writing—does not do justice to the full theological character and significance of figures long part of the church’s memory. In response I would, first, argue for the importance of some themes that seem most persuasive in modern historiography. One of the key gains of the modern period is that we have come to interpret key figures within the tradition by exploring their immediate engagements, the course of their development, and the questions that motivated their theological positions. I think one can give both philosophically coherent and theologically coherent justifications for this approach. Philosophically, I have long found myself indebted to Hans Robert Jauss’s development of Gadamer’s work.<sup>13</sup> Theologically, I would want to explore ways in which techniques of interpretation that increase our focus on the complexity of the Spirit’s work in and through a deeply human and fallen tradition can be received as a good.<sup>14</sup> More particularly, in a time when Christians (including many theologians) lack much sense of the historical location and traditional quality of Christian belief and practice, it is both ironic and providential that one of modernity’s legacies to Christianity should be tools for better understanding how the articles of our faith are deeply embedded in a distinct historical tradition.

At the same time, however, there are and should be many ways into the tradition. The task of introducing someone to the interlocking themes of a theologian is different from assessing the place of that theologian in a complex story of development. I do not imagine that *Nicaea* sits as the only book on anyone’s shelf, and I would not claim that *Nicaea* provides a rounded introduction to the theological outlook of any of those it describes. Similarly, Anatolios’s own excellent treatment of some fundamental themes in Athanasius’s thought does not offer an extensive introduction to either Athanasius’s exegetical practice or to his ascetic theology, and I would not expect it to do so.<sup>15</sup> I can certainly imagine, then,

<sup>13</sup> See especially Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory,” *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (trans. Timothy Bahti; Theory and History of Literature 2; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 3–45.

<sup>14</sup> I have, I am sure, been much influenced here by my engagement with Rowan Williams’s work, especially the manner in which he draws parallels between particular patterns of listening to the human other and listening to the voice of the past (now very helpfully drawn out in Medi Ann Volpe’s “‘Taking Time’ and ‘Making Sense’: Rowan Williams on the Habits of Theological Imagination,” forthcoming). My own sense is that this account requires a much more explicit trinitarian ecclesiology as its supplement.

<sup>15</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998).



a variety of texts focusing on the overall outlook of a given theologian that would sit alongside *Nicaea* and might well be more appropriate for particular times or places.

However, I do not want to end my response with only these two observations. There is, in fact, a relationship between the achievements of modern historical scholarship on the early Church and the task of offering a rounded picture of a given theologian. I do not think, for example, that a presentation of Athanasius as a whole which argued that he simply represented the fullness of pro-Nicene trinitarianism would be accurate. A number of his key arguments are simply not carried through into later tradition (such as some key elements of the manner in which the Spirit is dependent on the Son in the *Epistulae ad Serapionem*), and some of the basic principles of pro-Nicene theology only enter his thought rather late and do not become structural (such as a focus on the unity and diversity of persons). Thus I do think one of the most significant implications of modern historical approaches for the presentation of figures such as Athanasius is that their theologies are best described against the background of narratives of development that respect the best of what we can currently accomplish. In many ways this was always so: presenting Athanasius as the paradigm of Nicene orthodoxy is itself the product of a particular narrative, if not always one which admits much development in Christian doctrine.

I suspect, however, that part of Anatolios's concern is that against such a background a figure such as Athanasius will find himself reduced in importance. From one perspective this may be so, but I think we also must continue to examine what it means to present a figure from Christian tradition as saint, for it is with this broad theological topic that Anatolios is partially concerned. In the first place, surely it is the case that any figure is presented for emulation not purely because of the figure's own merits. To attribute sainthood is to acknowledge that the Christian community has seen in a particular person the Spirit's work towards the building up of the body of Christ. (At the risk of seeming overly Augustinian, I cannot resist repeating *Dei dona sunt merita tua*, "your merits are the gifts of God.")<sup>16</sup> If we are part of ecclesial bodies that acknowledge and salute development in the manner in which the Church describes the mystery of faith, then I see no reason why we cannot acknowledge some as exemplars in their attention to the mystery of faith who only gradually came to express that mystery in the terms of an orthodoxy that would become clear after their time, but who paved the way for much that was accomplished after them.<sup>17</sup> Of course, such an acknowledgment does beg the question of how we express and describe the continuities that we are alleging do

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Serm.* 297.4; *Gest. Pelag.* 14.35.

<sup>17</sup> Precisely here, obviously enough, does it become clear that there is a relationship between our engagement with modern historical consciousness and the shape of Christian piety and prayer. I would, however, want to isolate this interface as an area needing exploration rather than one about which much can be said with certainty. I do think that theological reflection on this interface involves some particularly difficult questions about the relationship between the Spirit and ecclesiology.

exist. Once again, I suspect, after some generations of concentration on examples of local (temporal or spatial) examples of the complexity of development, the broad appropriation of modern historiographical techniques is forcing on us anew questions about what it is to speak of continuity and change in belief, questions that need facing on a large and theoretical canvas.

I come, finally, to some strong criticisms from John Behr. These criticisms once again take us to fundamental questions about how we engage in the theological enterprise. Behr argues that I am beholden to the categories of modern systematic theology in my very concern with “trinitarian theology.” He maintains that fourth-century theological texts cannot be so divided into distinct *loci* and that their authors did not conceive of their work along the lines of these divisions. He and I agree here, at least in our professed statements (as the brief summary earlier in this issue of the “three pro-Nicene strategies” delineated in *Nicaea* should have made clear). It seems to me, however, that the issue is not with the names we use to distinguish the various parts of theological discourse, but how we think those names correspond to the unity of and links between the different divisions of the theological field. By the phrase “trinitarian theology” we might designate only those sections of late-fourth-century texts that focus on understanding the unity of the divine power and nature alongside the irreducibility of the three persons,<sup>18</sup> but the same phrase might also be taken to describe a wider field of questions related in a variety of ways to particular conceptions of the relations between Father, Son, and Spirit. I use the term in the latter sense, specifically emphasizing the extent to which trinitarian belief entails or is inseparable from a range of christological, anthropological, and epistemological positions. The mere use of the term “trinitarian theology” does not indicate how one is using the term. In large part, then, this first accusation seems to me something of a canard. At the same time, however, I suspect this duck is really a fish. To be more precise, the duck is a red herring, hiding from us a more fundamental and significant concern that Behr has with *Nicaea*.

I suspect Behr’s critique is actually motivated by a desire to overcome what he takes to be a mistaken approach to speaking about the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Word of God. I hope I summarize correctly when I say that Behr sees much modern “systematic” discussion of “trinitarian theology,” presenting the Word as a pre-existent being with its own history, one stage of which consists in a descent to and then ascent from this world. This “modern paradigm” begins for Behr with Augustine (and here a fairly standard account of the divisions between Eastern and Western Christianity, otherwise noticeable in Behr’s work, creeps in). In his recent introduction to Christian belief he writes,

In the modern paradigm, the second person of the Trinity turns out to be a temporal being, who did various things as the “pre-incarnate logos” before

<sup>18</sup> E.g., those paragraphs of (Basil) *Ep.* 38 devoted to our terminology for unity and diversity in God, or Gregory Nazianzen’s *Or.* 29.2, the text in which he sets out a concept of the divine as perfect threeness.

becoming incarnate as Jesus Christ; his existence as Jesus Christ is but an episode in a longer biography. Ironically, this is the very position that the Council of Nicaea and those following it were at pains to refute! Moreover, where we stand in such a picture is left unspecified: what privileged vantage point do we have to describe the being of God prior to creation and then to speak of the “history” of his interaction with creation?<sup>19</sup>

On first reading there is much in this quotation with which I agree. I certainly agree that one clear achievement of the fourth-century controversies is that we cannot conceive of the Logos as a temporal being. But I think Behr misses something vital when he presents the alternatives as either speaking of the Logos in temporal fashion (and hence being at heart an “Arian”) or denying that one can ever speak of the being of God and God’s Word outside the context of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The effect of this stark alternative is seen most clearly through the various volumes of his “The Formation of Christian Theology” series in the topics that Behr considers and those he avoids. Thus, for example, in *The Nicene Faith*, Behr’s reading of Athanasius’s *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione* argues that Athanasius sees the dual work as an apology for the cross (an argument that makes much sense). The key to interpreting the *Contra gentes* becomes Athanasius’s identification of the Word with “our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup> Using this statement as a hinge, Behr emphasizes that Athanasius in his discussion of the creation is discussing the character of human existence as it may be known in the light of Christ, he is not “[speculating] about primordial beginnings.”<sup>21</sup> To do more would, I think, seem to Behr to begin sliding down the slippery slope towards what he names the Augustinian/modern paradigm in theology. Yet, as a consequence of this concern, Behr fails to offer sustained discussion about the sources for and character of Athanasius’s account of the Word *in se* (especially as they are found through *Contra Gentes* 38–44), despite giving Athanasius considerable space as a whole.

While I agree that Athanasius is casting his account of the creation, of the Word *in se*, and of the nature of evil in the light of his understanding of salvation through the cross—and that he considers it essential to identify the Word as the subject of the incarnate Christ (although this way of expressing the matter is not his own)—this casting occurs through a participation in and engaging of discussions about the ordering of the universe, the nature of evil, and the nature of God that

<sup>19</sup> John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006) 174. At the top of the same page he writes: “The move to such an approach to theology seems to begin with St. Augustine.” It is also contentious, to say the least, to argue that Nicaea’s opponents taught that the Logos had a temporal beginning. Arius’s insistence that the Logos was begotten “before the aeons” probably entitled him to being annoyed when accused of teaching that the Logos was born temporally: he most likely assumed that time was co-extensive with the aeons.

<sup>20</sup> The direct identification of the Word with the Lord and/or Savior Jesus Christ occurs at Athanasius, *C. Gent.* 2, 23, 33, 40, 47.

<sup>21</sup> See John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (The Formation of Christian Theology 2; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004) 1:174.

are essential to both early Christian and non-Christian thought in late antiquity. Talking about the nature of the Word as such or being interested in “speculation” about the creation does not necessarily mean that Athanasius has abandoned the perspective of the cross or begun to speak of the Word in terms that imply that the incarnation is a stage in the Word’s history.

In such engagements with different traditions of discourse one must of course remain faithful to the way in which Christians confess that the Word is Jesus Christ and vice versa, but I do not see why discussion of such topics in itself starts one down a slippery slope. It is perfectly possible for us to maintain discussion of the Word *in se* alongside appropriate attention to the manner in which our knowledge of the incarnate Christ shapes our talk of the Word *in se*. It seems to me that later eastern christological tradition recommends to us just such a balanced discussion in speaking of Christ’s double birth. For example, the second anathema of the second Council of Constantinople in 553 reads:

If anyone does not confess that the Word of God has two nativities, that which is before all ages from the Father, outside time and without a body, and secondly that nativity of these latter days when the Word of God came down from the heavens and was made flesh of holy and glorious Mary, mother of God and ever-virgin, and was born from her: let him be anathema.<sup>22</sup>

Maintaining the double birth of the Son demands of us some clarity about what we mean by “Word,” about how we think that the terminology of “begotten” should be deployed, and about how we understand the characteristics of divine existence. To speak of the birth as double also invites us into a constant correction of inappropriate speculation concerning the eternal birth by reference to the material qualities in which we speak of the birth from Mary. Such theological reflection is also conditioned by insistence (rightly so central to Behr’s presentation) that, although we speak of the double birth, we speak of one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the Word. The Word is the subject of all that Jesus does and is, and it is in the light of attention to this central dynamic of the Incarnation that we learn to speak of the birth of the Word in eternity, and learn we must.

Speaking of the Word born from eternity and of the Word’s birth from Mary is thus inherently paradoxical. There is here much to be learned from Cyril of Alexandria’s insistence against Nestorius that even though we must tell ourselves that the Word cannot change in his nature we are still committed to confessing that “the Word became flesh” and that “[He] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”<sup>23</sup> Of course the Logos has no history: when we speak of “before” the incarnation we do so only from our standpoint;

<sup>22</sup> For text and translation, see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (ed. Norman Tanner; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 1:113–14.

<sup>23</sup> See especially Cyril’s *Ep.* 4.3–6 (otherwise known as the “Second Letter to Nestorius”). The best translation into English is that of Lionel Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 3–11.

just as we say “only-begotten” but do not think either that there was ever a time before this begetting or that that time is implied by “begotten.” When Eph 1:4 tells us that the Father “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου),” we should think neither of the Father as involved in a process of deliberation nor of this occurring in a time before the act of creation. This maintenance of a paradoxical speech, delivered to us by the Spirit through the Scriptures, is inseparable from an understanding of the Christian’s need to advance in understanding of the mystery revealed.<sup>24</sup>

These reflections on temporality and confession bring us to the question of where we stand when we speak of God’s being prior to creation. Obviously enough we ourselves stand within the creation, but the Scriptures speak to us in human words of the divine being beyond the creation, of the divine being before time itself: the Father “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” For theologians as diverse as Athanasius, Augustine, Didymus the Blind, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa, we are drawn of necessity to speak about the God who acts to create and save. Even if we come to know with ever increasing clarity that we can speak of Father, Son, and Spirit only through close attention to their interactions and *idiomata* in Scripture, and that we can speak only of the divine nature as unknowable because it is transcendent and simple, still we have in fact spoken of the Trinity as such.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, our struggle towards such speech and imagining is a struggle towards the contemplation that virtually all pro-Nicenes present as constituting the goal of Christian life and the source of an authentic human life before God.<sup>26</sup> Doing so is an essential part of the development of our contemplation. Behr’s concerns about not falling into a temporal conception of the Word’s existence are thus on the mark, and yet, I think, he uses them too broadly and thus fails to grasp the full range of Christian discourse in late antiquity.

<sup>24</sup> Chapters 13–15 of *Nicaea* in part exist to emphasize that this principle is to be found fairly centrally among a wide range of pro-Nicenes. It is also worth noting that had we space for a more extensive christological discussion it would be instructive here to explore the differences between Barth’s notion of God’s eternal and free “self”-determination in the Son (and then the more overtly Hegelian—and less classically Christian—account of Pannenberg) and classical patristic accounts of the double birth of the Son. The differences in strategy between these various attempts to signal the trustworthiness of revelation and the impossibility of conceiving the Word temporally are subtle but real. My suspicion is that one of the most fascinating characteristics of John Behr as an Orthodox theologian is precisely the series of parallels between his christology and that of the German Protestant tradition mentioned here. One further observation that is linked to my drawing of this parallel is the relatively undeveloped state of pneumatology in Behr’s more synthetic *The Mystery of Christ*: is it overly mischievous to see this as yet a further sign of the Barthian character of Behr’s Orthodoxy?!

<sup>25</sup> A doctrine of the divine simplicity may well be used, as I have argued about pro-Nicenes, as a key plank in the argument that the divine nature cannot be comprehended, but it is still a positive statement.

<sup>26</sup> In a more extended discussion I would argue that such contemplation entails and is entailed by pro-Nicene accounts of life with and in the Trinity as the goal and source of Christian existence.

One of the more striking claims running through Behr's work in recent years is his insistence that the best place for us to enter the Christian faith is to see the manner in which the apostles "read" Jesus through the text of the Old Testament. To confess Christ is to confess that the Word of God revealed, in Christ, the one whom the Scriptures speak of in creation and the history of Israel. There is much in this with which, again, I find myself in agreement.<sup>27</sup> And yet, it is important to bear in mind that few after the earliest apostles actually do enter Christian belief in such a way *simpliciter*. The early Christian writers whose texts we study certainly entered into the practice of their faith through their initial introduction into Christian liturgy, community, and creed in ways that revealed Christ as the summation and completion of the law and the prophets. But these same writers also entered a highly traditioned faith, insofar as it participated in many traditions of reflection and speculation deeply rooted in the ancient world. When Gregory Nazianzen appears to assume the perfect qualities of a Godhead that finds its unity in being three, of course he assumes that our understanding of this Godhead is shaped by our awareness that the Word is the savior Jesus Christ, but he also participates in and contributes to a long-standing ancient discourse.<sup>28</sup> It seems important to me that we interpret him as both within and without that ancient philosophical tradition; our skill as interpreters depends on our ability to grasp his very Christian relationship to the materials he appropriates.

In sum, then, I suspect that behind Behr's critique lies an overly restrictive notion of the shape of appropriate Christian discourse, one that hampers our reading of pro-Nicenes. Both of us, however, in our rather different ways, are trying to approach a central question of interpretation and appropriation: to what extent is an engagement with Nicene theology an engagement with a theological culture in many ways deeply alien to that shaped by the modern post-Enlightenment discourses of academic theology? At this point, I suggest, we may detect differences in how Behr and I understand the task of bringing modern Christian thought into fruitful engagement with its early Christian foundation. I think we agree that recovering the basic practices of the best of early Christian exegesis—especially as it is used in the articulation of Christian belief—is fundamental for a Christianity that seeks to maintain its connection to the period within which those beliefs were formed and articulated. Yet, my own insistence that the culture of pro-Nicene (and eventually of Chalcedonian) Christianity centrally involved the adoption and adaptation of a range of late antique non-Christian traditions and discussions forces on a further range of questions about how we may engage and sustain a culture of Christian belief in continuity with that foundational period. Thus, while it might seem as if these reflections on John Behr's critique have taken us away from the theme

<sup>27</sup> I have found the summary reading of Christ in the Scriptures found in his first volume, *The Way to Nicaea* (The Formation of Christian Theology 1; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 49–70 extremely helpful in a regular patristic christology class.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 29.2

of the relationship between history and theology, it is not so. How we understand the structure and methods of the theology we study is intimately related to our understanding of the shape of possible engagements and appropriations.

This engagement with John Behr's critique, precisely because I recognize a deep disagreement within some common assumptions and concerns, has suggested to me a number of ways in which a putative second edition of *Nicaea* would need supplementing, for, in articulating answers to one's critics, new ways of taking forward and reshaping one's own project constantly appear. My account of the "culture" of pro-Nicene thought needs filling out not only through reflection on the habits and *habitus* of thought shared by pro-Nicenes but also through some delineation of the interaction between different ancient discourses incorporated into pro-Nicene texts. Doing so would perhaps give a fuller sense of how pro-Nicenes saw their thought as focused around the saving work of the Word made flesh even as they also engaged and adapted a wide variety of ancient discourses to give a sense of the contemplation towards which Christians are drawn. At this point in these reflections it will appear to some that I have come full circle and am now advocating for that which I seemed to reject when discussing Rebecca Lyman's critique. In part this would be a fair observation: the task of imagining the shape of a particular theologian's thought in antiquity (or a group of theologians) will always be an aesthetic judgment *ex convenientia*. I would, however, also observe that, whereas my questions to Lyman were aimed towards not overly restricting our sense of the explanatory power of Christian discourse, my remarks here are in aid of expanding our sense of what constitutes appropriate Christian discourse.

It is no accident that throughout this reflection on my critics I have constantly returned to the implicit and explicit theologies of those who explore the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century. The relationship between modern theological discourses and the methods and assumptions that we choose in our historical theological investigations (not surprisingly) become more central and perhaps more obvious the more we consider how the trinitarian controversies as a whole should be cast and narrated. And yet those relationships are there throughout the interpretive judgments we make as historical theologians. It is an exciting feature of current historical theological scholarship that reflection on the theological foundations of our enterprise is receiving more overt discussion than has been the case for two or three decades. I am not so naïve as to think that my comments will have converted those to whom they respond, but it is not too much to take this discussion as one sign of an emerging debate about the place of historical reflection in theology, a debate from which much may come.

# Final Reflections

John Behr and Khaled Anatolios

## ***John Behr:***

As a concluding comment, I should like to return to the point raised by Ayres, that it is not enough simply to tell a better version of the fourth-century history in the expectation that modern theologians will finally get it straight! This is a valid point: if we want to have Christianity's fourth-century heritage taken seriously, we need to be in dialogue with modern writers. But, if there is to be a dialogue, both sides must be allowed to speak, and so we are also responsible for expounding the historical material on its own terms. As Heidegger put it, "[O]nly when we think through what has been thought will we be of any use for what must still be thought."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps studying the figures from a distant era will open up for us possibilities we would never have dreamed of within our own modern presuppositions, so that we can recognize differences even beyond those which lie within our own horizon or tradition. If I am right in affirming that there is a different style of doing theology prior to Augustine<sup>2</sup> and after him in the East than that which we find in the theological and scholarly tradition in which Ayres's book stands, then we must ask whether we need to address the question of the legitimacy of each (and ponder how one might even answer that) or whether a plurality of approaches is possible without reducing one to the other. In a way, this would be a further step toward deconstructing monolithic notions of "Orthodoxy" in recognition of genuine and legitimate diversity within early Christianity and among modern Christians. Might it be better not to speak of Nicaea and its legacy, but of the legacies of Nicaea—or better—"Christ and him crucified" (2 Cor 2:2) and the ways in which Nicaea and its interpreters affirm the true divinity of this one?

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (trans. Joan Stambaugh; New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 41.

<sup>2</sup> With the various qualifications regarding him mentioned earlier.



*Khaled Anatolios:*

In responding to my criticisms, Ayres places me “at the right” and characterizes our difference as my rejection or suspicion of his “historicizing approach” which interprets “key figures within the tradition by exploring their immediate engagements.”<sup>1</sup> I must protest that I have no problems whatsoever with a “historicizing approach” so defined. In light of Ayres’s assessment of where we differ, let me articulate very simply and transparently the essential point of difference as I see it. In a word, I find an inconsistency between Ayres’s theoretical claims and his actual narration of fourth-century theology. That is to say, his advocacy of a pro-Nicene culture theoretically privileges holistic accounts of Christian life and distinct practices of scriptural exegesis as bearing the intelligibility of different trinitarian positions, yet his narration focuses too narrowly on terminology and the particular question of inter-trinitarian relations. A final example of this tension illustrates the point: Ayres concludes his chapter on Gregory of Nyssa, which is predominantly concerned with *Ad Ablabium*, with the admonition that we need to reprioritize our assessment of Gregory’s texts: “Rather than turning first to the *Ad Ablabium*, I suggest we make far more use of three texts: *Catechetical Orations*, *Refutation of Eunomius’s Confession*, and *Contra Eunomium 2*.”<sup>2</sup> I agree with the principle here espoused but am puzzled by its lack of implementation in the very chapter which it concludes; that is emblematic of my agreement and disagreement with Ayres’s work. As this example indicates, my concerns are not simply reducible to the question of the demotion or promotion of Athanasius in retellings of fourth-century debates, though we do have different opinions regarding this issue. What I miss is the lack of a discussion of the incarnation as much in Gregory of Nazianzus as in Athanasius, and I lament the lack of exposition of the exegetical moorings of trinitarian doctrine as much in the treatment of the bishop of Hippo as in that of the Alexandrian. It is true enough that one book cannot contain everything, but this is precisely why questions of prioritization and perspective become key methodological principles. So my fundamental discomfort has to do precisely with the prioritizing of what I have called the mathematics of tri-unity over the presentation of a holistic vision of Christian life in which a particular reading of Scripture is appropriated and performed. My own contention is that it is the latter presentation, however incompletely achieved, that should have logical priority since it is this presentation that contains the intelligibility of a given trinitarian doctrine and gives rise to it.

That said, it would not accurately reflect my appreciation of Ayres’s achievement to end on a note of dissatisfaction. I, like other students of the fourth century, am much indebted to Ayres for his invaluable work in this book. While I would respectfully decline to place myself precisely at his right (perhaps my caution against

<sup>1</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

a blanket denunciation of the whole enterprise of modern systematic theology will have me transferred to the left!), I am happy to reiterate my fundamental sympathies with some of his guiding principles and to express my gratitude for his prodigious and fruitful labors.

## **PART II:**

### **Beyond “East” and “West”: Re-Thinking Paradigms and Sources**

# An Answer to de Régnon's Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of "His" Paradigm\*

Kristin Hennessy  
*Harvard Divinity School*

The publication of this work in 1892 made de Régnon the most influential and yet least known of Catholic historians of doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

I come not to bury Théodore de Régnon but to praise him. Seldom has history shared this intent. In the hundred-odd years since the publication of his four-volume *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, de Régnon has been buried four times over, one funeral for each volume, it would seem.<sup>2</sup> He was buried first by French scholars, who adopted his portrait of "Latin" and "Greek" theologies,<sup>3</sup> only to invert, reverse, or ridicule it.<sup>4</sup> A second burial followed at the hands of

\* I extend my thanks to Sarah Coakley, Lewis Ayres, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Robert St. Hilaire, Peter Kronenberg, and Mark Scott for their help in bringing this essay to its present form.

<sup>1</sup> Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995) 51–79, at 51.

<sup>2</sup> Théodore de Régnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (3 vols. bound as 4; Paris: Victor Retaux, 1892–1898). I deal primarily here with the first volume, published in 1892, whose fourth, fifth, and sixth *études* have proven so influential through the "de Régnon paradigm." For ease, I shall refer throughout this essay to the second half of the third volume (bound separately) as volume four. While, ideally, I would wish to present de Régnon's words in the original French, I have chosen, for the sake of readability, to translate my quotations and to provide the French in the footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> I use the headings "Greek" and "Latin" as de Régnon himself uses them, where "Greek" refers to patristic theologians writing in both Latin and Greek, and "Latin" refers to scholastic theologians. I place the headings between quotation marks in order to signal, against frequent misappropriations of these headings (and the groups they represent) by later recipients of the paradigm, their referential rather than descriptive quality. For an extended discussion of these headings and the groups they represent, see below the section in this paper entitled, "On the Terms 'Latin' and 'Greek.'"

<sup>4</sup> Barnes, to whose article "De Régnon Reconsidered" I owe my understanding of de Régnon's reception and influence, tells that French scholarship "has had a lively running argument over

neo-Palamite scholars, most notably Vladimir Lossky, whose *Théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* bears significant traces of de Régnon's influence, traces which were largely effaced in the subsequent English edition.<sup>5</sup> He was buried yet again in English scholarship, which often assumed, but rarely accredited, de Régnon's paradigmatic distinction between "Latin" and "Greek" theologies.<sup>6</sup> We could call this an unmarked grave, as his *Études* became the hidden spine supporting English textbook accounts of trinitarian development.<sup>7</sup> Finally, a fourth interment seems even now underway: after Michel René Barnes uncovered the simultaneous omnipresence and invisibility of de Régnon's thought in the last century, some commentators have begun to use the phrase "de Régnon's paradigm" as a shorthand category by which to lump overly schematic and inaccurate accounts of trinitarian development.<sup>8</sup> Scholars now aiming to refute these accounts prepare to bury de Régnon for a fourth time by shrouding him in his purported paradigm and relegating both to that final resting place reserved for dead theologies.<sup>9</sup>

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whether de Régnon was right about his paradigm" (55). Among those engaged, Barnes names Henri Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe* (Paris: Cerf, 1951); André Malet, *Personne et amour dans la théologie trinitaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1956); Ghislain Lafont, *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jésus-Christ?* (Cogitatio fidei 44; Paris: Cerf, 1969); Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, "Réflexions sur la théologie trinitaire à propos de quelques livres anciens et récents," *Istina* 17 (1972) 457–64; Bertrand de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier, 1944) esp. ch. 3, "Dieu-Trinité." While the French edition shows a substantial debt to de Régnon through citations that establish the provenance in de Régnon's volume of a number of the patristic texts Lossky uses, the English edition, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), removes these citations (Barnes, "De Régnon," 58). While this removal may not, as Barnes maintains, prove an overt design to hide the influence of de Régnon on Lossky's thought, it nevertheless constitutes a kind of "burial," in that de Régnon's presence becomes much less explicit in the English volume than in the French. However one may choose to interpret this removal, the fact remains that the English edition bears fewer explicit traces of de Régnon's influence over Lossky.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes identifies the unacknowledged influence of "de Régnon's paradigm" in the following English volumes: Frederick Crowe, *Doctrine of the Holy Trinity* (Willowdale: Regis College, 1956–1966); James Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity* (London: SCM, 1983); John O'Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1985); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> In her introduction to the recent volume, *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (ed. Sarah Coakley; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), Sarah Coakley uncovers further reverberations of the "de Régnon paradigm" in significant English textbooks on patristic trinitarianism: G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958); Edward Hardy and Cyril Richardson, eds., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (London: SCM, 1954); Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon"; idem, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 237–50.

<sup>9</sup> So Dennis Jowers opens his recent article, "Divine Unity and the Economy of Salvation in the *De Trinitate* of Augustine" (*Reformed Theological Review* 60 [2001] 68–84), by declaring his intent to disprove "two dictums" that "most theologians in the English-speaking world have accepted

Before we cast the last clod over de Régnon and “his” paradigm, I would like to speak a few words over his body of work. For while “de Régnon’s paradigm” has recently been exposed as simplistic and misleading, much yet remains to expound concerning de Régnon himself. So this essay aims to continue the work Barnes began, in sifting back through the layers that have accrued over de Régnon’s *Études*. But whereas Barnes uncovered these layers in order to offer an initial reception history of that muddy entity, “de Régnon’s paradigm,” this essay attends rather to what those layers have obscured, namely how de Régnon conceived of his own project, how he framed it, and what he hoped it would accomplish. This essay, in short, seeks to distinguish further between “de Régnon’s paradigm” and de Régnon.

So this essay takes up de Régnon’s *Études* on their own terms, to reveal de Régnon’s underlying intent to stress the complementarity and unity that exist between the “Latin” and “Greek” theological approaches.<sup>10</sup> I shall argue that de Régnon aimed, through his presentation of the two approaches, to offer what he saw as a necessary theological alternative to the increasingly rigid neo-Scholasticism of his day.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, I shall show that, contrary to the narrow, divisive “de Régnon’s paradigm” that later arose, de Régnon himself sought to bring about a rapprochement of these two approaches in light of the persistent mystery of the Trinity and the failure of any single system, even neo-Thomism, to express this mystery fully.

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unquestionably,” dictums he ascribes to de Régnon (68). Similarly, Lewis Ayres positions a recent study of Gregory of Nyssa against the “de Régnon paradigm,” namely against the tendency of scholars “to understand Gregory by reading his thought against the backdrop of a division of pro-Nicene theologians into general ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ groups according to their supposed preference for ‘beginning from’ unity or diversity in the Godhead” (Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology As Seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*,” in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 15–16).

<sup>10</sup> Barnes does make, in passing, observations similar to those that I shall develop here regarding the unity and complementarity that de Régnon traces between the “Latins” and “Greeks.” Thus he remarks, “de Régnon’s scholarly mission [is] to present different accounts of the Trinity without requiring or forcing the reader to choose among them since they are all necessary to understand God and since, as we shall see, there exists among them all a kind of unity” (“De Régnon,” 53). Barnes also notes de Régnon’s insistence that one study many theological explanations in light of the mystery of the Trinity (52). Given, however, that Barnes swiftly passes over these points on his way to discussing the reception of de Régnon and particularly given that he quotes the receiving tradition but not de Régnon himself, I judge it worth returning to such matters anew in order to offer an extended and expanded portrait of de Régnon’s views and to expound on the implications of these views for his and for our own time.

<sup>11</sup> The labels, neo-Scholasticism and neo-Thomism, admittedly postdate the movements they describe. Those I refer to here as “neo-Thomists” would certainly not have labeled themselves by that name. While anachronistic, these labels nevertheless enable us to distinguish between those medieval scholastic thinkers whom the nineteenth-century theologians were reviving, and the nineteenth-century theologians themselves. Alas, de Régnon does not ease our task in identifying or labeling this group, for he refers to those contemporaries to whom he responds only by cagey barb and the general label, “modern theologians.” To avoid confusion, I shall refer to them here as “neo-Thomist.”

This understanding of de Régnon's project, with its ecumenical and apophatic dimensions, has ramifications for current trinitarian scholarship.<sup>12</sup> First, it allows us to free de Régnon from the stigma of "his" paradigm, for it underscores the real distance between de Régnon's project and the paradigm that arose after him. Second, it repositions de Régnon with regard to the paradigm shift under way in our current moment in systematics and patristics, since it suggests how de Régnon's intentions, ironically enough, prove not entirely incompatible with the new historiography of Ayres and others discussed in this volume of *Harvard Theological Review*. And, third, it illustrates only more persuasively how foundational "de Régnon's paradigm" has proven to the trinitarian thought of the last century. In light of this revised understanding of de Régnon, we see that later readers, not de Régnon himself, were the true authors of "de Régnon's paradigm."

Yielding the floor to de Régnon and his *Études*, this essay goes against the trend of the last century. While many theologians and scholars borrow from his work, knowingly or unknowingly, few engage with him directly, and even fewer cite his *Études*.<sup>13</sup> Barnes, studying the influence of de Régnon among French Augustinians, offers one reason for this neglect: "de Régnon's paradigm is such a 'cliché' that its refutation does not require citing its original authentic expression."<sup>14</sup> Another reason for this absence may well be the length, language, and, *de nos jours*, near unavailability of the sizeable volumes of the *Études*. Nor will the recent critical attention to de Régnon, sparked by Barnes, necessarily alter this situation. Since Barnes himself aims, first and foremost, to uncover the *influence* of de Régnon over the last century, he devotes little time to distinguishing between the oft repeated paradigm and the actual account of trinitarian development that de Régnon presents. Thus the majority of Barnes's references to de Régnon's *Études* fall in the footnotes, and only a few short quotations from de Régnon dot Barnes's articles. Recent scholars, following Barnes's account of "de Régnon's paradigm," continue the cycle of neglect—citing Barnes citing theologians who do not cite de Régnon—still not citing de Régnon. Given this persistent absence, as well as the difficulty of accessing the original text behind the paradigm, I shall devote much of this essay to unfolding de Régnon's own designs for his project.

<sup>12</sup> De Régnon never directly employs the term "apophatic" in reference to his own project or other authors. But perhaps I may be forgiven for applying to his text a favored term of our day, given that his text is so pervaded by his own favored term—"mystery." Whether we call his aims "apophatic" or trace how, through his particular form of positive theology, he hopes to lead the reader down the *via negativa* toward mystery, the point is ultimately the same: "Moins comprendre, mieux connaître, telle est la devise que je propose au lecteur" (1.49).

<sup>13</sup> Thus Barnes notes that Le Guillou does not cite de Régnon directly in his rejection of "de Régnon's paradigm," but rather cites Malet's and Lafont's characterizations of him ("De Régnon," 59). How ironic, in light of the consistent reduction of de Régnon's vast project to a pat formula, that an early reviewer declared of the *Études*, "le résumé devient presque impossible, en présence d'un cadre à la fois si vaste et si complexe" (D. Urbain Baltus, review of *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, in *Revue Bénédictine* 16.7 [1899] 333).

<sup>14</sup> Barnes, "De Régnon," 60.

A cursory glance at de Régnon's *Études* does, to some degree, explain how the paradigm was first set into motion. For de Régnon reiterates, again and again, a portrait of "Greek" and "Latin" theologies that systematizes how each theology progresses in its consideration of the Trinity: the "Greeks" begin with reflection on persons and move to reflection on nature, and the "Latins" move from nature to persons.<sup>15</sup> But there is much more to de Régnon's *Études* than one can perceive at a quick glance. While the receiving tradition has focused on and reiterated out of context de Régnon's paradigmatic distinction, de Régnon himself crafted two important frames for his paradigm within the larger *Études*. These two frames, historical and internal, alter utterly the meaning of the paradigm.

### ■ De Régnon in Context

To trace fully the interaction of the *Études* with the complex historical situation in which they were written lies beyond the scope of this study. Happily, de Régnon eases the task of positioning him with regard to his context through asides he makes, throughout the *Études*, about the theological developments of his time. Although de Régnon never names his targets—he directs his barbs toward "modern theologians" en masse—he laments practices that proceed from the neo-Thomist revival then under way. Brief but potent, these critiques of "modern theologians" suggest how wary de Régnon was of the theological tendencies of his time and point us toward viewing his *Études* as a conscious response to the dangers he perceived.<sup>16</sup>

In a first aside, de Régnon criticizes the tendency of contemporary dogmatists simply to "bring a text by saint Thomas to bear as an irrefutable rule" in any given discussion.<sup>17</sup> Such a practice, he warns, leads to distortion of Thomas's ideas, since his contemporaries know only too well how to make an idea "bend and follow the directions they wish."<sup>18</sup> When a single thinker's ideas become authoritative or the test of orthodoxy—as Thomas's had following the release of Leo XIII's *Aeterni*

<sup>15</sup> To offer a comprehensive listing of the occurrences of this paradigmatic distinction would be quite impossible, as it recurs ceaselessly across the studies in question (four, five, and six). For one of his fuller treatments, see 1.428–35.

<sup>16</sup> In accordance with that moment's complexity, de Régnon's response to his time was complex. While I shall trace here signs of de Régnon's distrust of the more rigid neo-Thomism that began to spring up following the release of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879), one could also note how the first volume of the *Études* participates in and is in accord with the tenor of its time. De Régnon's long "Introduction" on epistemology fits well within the efforts that Catholic theologians had already been making for some years to push back the tide of modern philosophy while at the same time responding to its epistemological challenges. Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor," claims a certain pride of place in de Régnon's "Exposition de Dogme," an exposition largely dotted with scholastic writers.

<sup>17</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.46: "Apporter un texte de saint Thomas, comme une règle indiscutable." Gerald McCool characterizes the neo-Thomist revival as "nothing less than a proposal to replace all the existing systems of Catholic theology with a single system," that of Thomas (*Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism* [New York: Fordham University Press, 1989] 136).

<sup>18</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.46: "Trop souvent on sait en faire une règle de plomb, qui se plie et suit tous les contours que l'on veut!"



*Patris*, at the time when de Régnon was writing his *Études*—de Régnon judged that the ideas themselves suffer because the accuracy of an interpretation becomes less important than the stamp of authority a prooftext can confer. If de Régnon was alert to such individual instances of interpretive jostling under neo-Thomism, in which Thomas was used as the situation demanded, he was even more aware and wary of the tendency among historians to jostle all other theologians to fit them to Thomas's thought. So, in a second aside, he remarks how historians of dogma tended to bend all other thinkers to the rule of scholastic thought: "The majority of treatises of positive theology," he laments, "have for a goal to show the agreement of the entire tradition with the Roman faith."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the school manuals released after *Aeterni Patris* aimed to do just that, in accordance with the encyclical's celebration of Thomas as the unifier and perfecter of the entire preceding tradition.<sup>20</sup> To these two levels of distortion, de Régnon adds yet a third critique of the current practice of his day: not only is Thomas twisted to answer every theological problem, and not only are other, earlier thinkers being made to bow before scholastic theology, but moreover, he repines, even other scholastic thinkers are being silenced in deference to the "Prince de la Scolastique."<sup>21</sup> Taken together, these critiques reveal de Régnon's distrust of the near unilateral emphasis on Thomas that was overtaking theological and historical reflection.

If the more staunch neo-Thomists found in Thomas the unifying answer to the Church's disparate teachings and the divisive attacks of modern philosophy, de Régnon perceived that a total reliance on Thomas's thought creates as many problems as it solves. So he rather daringly cautions his reader against looking to any single system, even Scholasticism, for an authoritative answer to theological questions: "Even while taking advantage of the benefits of this system," he writes, "whether to refute heresy or to systematize orthodox teaching, we must nevertheless beware of becoming boxed in by it and resting in it as if it were a definitive system.

<sup>19</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 3.58: "La plupart des traités de théologie positive . . . ont pour but de montrer l'accord de la tradition universelle avec la foi romaine."

<sup>20</sup> McCool judges that "from the beginning of the neo-Thomist revival the glaring weakness of nineteenth-century Thomism had been its weakness in the areas of history and positive theology" (*Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 239). In lieu of being encouraged to study ancient sources directly, on their own terms, students from the period following Leo XIII's influential encyclical were trained by "school manuals whose purpose was the clear exposition of safe 'received' Thomistic doctrine rather than the stimulation of original thought" (*ibid.*, 238). In this context, de Régnon's "retour aux sources de la tradition doctrinale" shows itself decidedly against the grain.

<sup>21</sup> See 1.47. In the second volume of the *Études*, de Régnon proves himself ahead of his time in the distinctions that he draws between scholastic theologians. These differences were largely ignored by the neo-Thomists of his moment, who blended the diversity of the scholastic thinkers into a single, unified viewpoint. That this approach was novel and threatening may be seen in the defensive rebuttal de Régnon voices in his third volume, a rebuttal that answers critiques he had evidently received following the publication of his second volume concerning scholastic theology: "On m'a reproché d'avoir exagéré les divergences entre leur enseignement et celui de saint Thomas. Ne pourrait-on reprocher à nos théologiens d'oublier complètement ces différences?" (3.397).

There is nothing immutable but the faith.”<sup>22</sup> De Régnon’s concern here hits a precise target, since a major goal of the neo-Thomists was to “systematize orthodox teaching” by presenting Thomas as the fulfillment of all previous theological writing.<sup>23</sup> But de Régnon clearly fears that through this presentation some “modern theologians” have begun to view Thomism as a “definitive system.” He explains his concern, “They’ve forgotten . . . that to lift itself toward mystery, the reason can follow other ‘paths,’ *alia via* as saint Thomas says, and they have confused the canonical exposition of dogma with a simple analogical explication.”<sup>24</sup> Such asides and assertions, scattered throughout the text, boldly reveal de Régnon’s concern that, under the more rigid forms of neo-Thomism, contemporary theologians and historians of doctrine were sacrificing the true diversity of views existing across the theological tradition while simultaneously yielding a dangerous, dogmatic status to that one system mandated by the highest ecclesial and earthly authority.<sup>25</sup> The *Études* form de Régnon’s response to the dangers he perceived in the single-minded approach of the neo-Thomists.

In fact, the broad design behind the *Études* directly responds to these dangers. At a moment when he feared that Thomas alone was being heard, de Régnon aimed to open the way for other voices to reenter the theological conversation. So his four-volume study prints large swaths of texts from the patristic and scholastic periods, which present multiple, varied ways of approaching and explaining the Trinity in the hopes of moving theological reflection back toward a fuller, more diverse understanding of the Trinity and the history of trinitarian reflection. This “retour aux sources”—strikingly like the *ressourcement* of the *nouvelle théologie* still years away—stood in real tension with the neo-Thomists’ aim to unify all the tradition and all teaching under Thomas. Aware of this tension, de Régnon wisely claims Leo XIII as the authorizing figure behind his turn to a broader study of theological sources: “This is why Leo XIII recommends that all go back to saint Thomas, for he is the source from which all the streams of modern theology flow.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.328: “Tout en profitant des avantages de cette théorie, soit pour écarter l’hérésie, soit pour systématiser l’enseignement orthodoxe, il faut donc prendre garde de s’y renfermer et de s’y reposer comme dans une œuvre définitive. Il n’y a d’immuable que la foi.”

<sup>23</sup> As McCool relates, the neo-Thomism spawned by *Aeterni Patris* showed the scholastic system to be “the essence of the patristic thought which it had superseded” (*Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 233).

<sup>24</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 3.563–64: “Certains théologiens, largement instruits dans la méthode augustinienne, oublièrent que pour s’élever vers le mystère, la raison pouvait suivre d’autres ‘voies,’ *alia via* comme dit saint Thomas, et confondirent avec l’exposition canonique du dogme une explication de simple analogie.”

<sup>25</sup> To de Régnon’s mind, this singular focus had wreaked particularly devastating effects in the realm of trinitarian theology. He asserts that reflection on the Trinity had almost disappeared in his day: “Il semble qu’à notre époque, le dogme de l’Unité divine ait comme absorbé le dogme de la Trinité dont on ne parle que par mémoire” (1.365).

<sup>26</sup> De Régnon, *Études* 1.331: “Voilà pourquoi Léon XIII recommande à tous de revenir à saint Thomas, parce que c’est la source d’où sont dérivés tous les ruisseaux de théologie moderne.”

De Régnon thus positions his own project under the banner of Thomas, as he claims that it participates in the spirit of Thomistic revival and the educational reforms initiated by Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*. De Régnon, however, does not claim the Pope's approval solely with regard to his presentation of Thomas. Rather, he assures the reader that "the Pontiff's thought is yet more lofty, and his gaze reaches still further. In reinstating the cult of the Greek Doctors, he invites us to return to those sources even more vital, being closer to the initial outpouring."<sup>27</sup> Authorizing his project to turn beyond neo-Thomism's singular regard for the scholastic system by means of Leo XIII, whose encyclical first elevated Thomas above all others, de Régnon thus masks the subversive nature of his *Études*.

While Leo XIII does in fact celebrate the rich tradition of Fathers who had established philosophy in the Church, de Régnon approaches these Fathers in a spirit not entirely in keeping with the one that governed the contemporary neo-Thomists or even the one in which Leo XIII praised them. For de Régnon shows how patristic writers offer an alternate system of trinitarian reflection to the scholastic one, but he does not prove, as Leo XIII and the neo-Thomist manuals might have wanted, how they had shown forth a preliminary version of the system that the Angelic Doctor later perfected.<sup>28</sup> In truth, de Régnon recognizes that the design of his *Études*, with its unequivocal celebration of the alternate "Greek" system, might seem to some readers to convey a veiled critique of recently mandated Thomistic thought. His defensive tone, as he refutes this concern, suggests that the *Études* were interpreted by some in precisely that way: "Is it truly necessary," he demands, "for the hundredth time, to reiterate to anxious minds that this comparison is not remotely a critique, but rather a simple rapprochement, like the putting side by side of similar colors, in order that one might better appreciate the nuances of each?"<sup>29</sup> However he may defend his intentions, the point remains that de Régnon's design to "retremper l'enseignement à ses sources primitives"—the design that lies at the root of his paradigm—does comprise a critical and corrective engagement with the too narrow neo-Thomism of his time.

<sup>27</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.331: "Mais la pensée du Pontife est encore plus haute, et son regard va plus loin. En rétablissant le culte des Docteurs grecs, il nous invite à remonter jusqu'à ces sources plus vives encore, parce qu'elles sont plus voisines de l'effusion primitive."

<sup>28</sup> In a context of staunch neo-Thomism, the direct reading of primary sources, like de Régnon emphasized through his large quotations of patristic writers, could prove problematic. In fact, Barnes tells that there remained a "tendency," even among Catholics of the twentieth century, "to regard the actual reading of historical sources as superfluous if not subversive in virtue of official interpretations (such as those of Thomas Aquinas)" (Barnes, "Augustine," 241).

<sup>29</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 3.284: "Faut-il pour la centième fois rappeler aux esprits inquiets que cette comparaison n'est point une critique, mais un simple rapprochement, comme on met côte à côte deux couleurs semblables, pour mieux distinguer la nuance de chacune?" For another such remark, see 4.129.

## ■ On the Terms “Latin” and “Greek”

De Régnon's historical engagement has tended to get lost in the last century's reception of the paradigm, for later theologians and historians who built on de Régnon's model carelessly and loosely elided the true purpose of his speech about “Latin” and “Greek” trinitarianisms. Later writers would recapitulate a paradigmatic division between Eastern and Western trinitarian thought, *tout court*, or they would oppose the Cappadocians with Augustine.<sup>30</sup> But de Régnon uses the headings “Greek” and “Latin” in a very different way, to very different ends, than later recipients of this distinction. He distinguishes between the “Latins,” by which he means scholastic theologians, and the “Greeks,” by which he means patristic theologians writing in both Latin and Greek.<sup>31</sup> His intention to bring the scholastic theologians, then so predominant, into conversation with the earlier Fathers of the church is thus written into the very terms of his paradigmatic utterances.

The difficulty arises from the fact that de Régnon does not use the terms of this comparison with great consistency or define them with great care. So while he does clearly declare, on separate occasions, that he wishes to compare the scholastic approach with the “Greek” one, he frequently slips into referring to the scholastic approach by the shorthand “Latin.”<sup>32</sup> This slippage would not necessarily constitute a damning error if de Régnon did not trace, in the section immediately preceding

<sup>30</sup> In the latter terms, David Brown recapitulates the paradigm: “In short the difference is constituted by whether one starts with the one as given or the threeness. Augustine will be taken as the obvious representative of the former approach . . . the slightly earlier Cappadocian Fathers of the latter model, particularly Gregory of Nyssa” (Brown, *Divine Trinity*, 243); O'Donnell and LaCugna follow suit in this recapitulation according to Augustine and the Cappadocians. Among those who reiterate the distinction along an East/West divide, one might cite Lossky (who contrasts “Orient” with “Occident,” even if he does nuance these categories) and, more recently, John Zizioulas, who characterizes “de Régnon's paradigm” as “the well-known textbook thesis that the West began with the unity of God and then moved to the Trinity, while the East followed the opposite course” (“The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act* [ed. C. Schwöbel; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995] 46, quoted in Lewis Ayres, “‘Remember That You Are Catholic’ (serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.1 [2000] 40).

<sup>31</sup> Barnes also notes the misuse of these original terms by later writers (“De Régnon,” 54). André de Halleux pushes this clarification of categories yet further, perceptively remarking that de Régnon “ne mettait pas en contraste les traditions latine et grecque comme telles et dans leur ensemble . . . À son sens, le ‘schéma grec’ restait donc représenté en Occident par la majorité des Pères latins ainsi que par des scolastiques tels que Richard de Saint-Victor et Bonaventure, tandis que les Grecs de l'école alexandrine, ou un Épiphané de Salamine, offraient une approche de type latin” (“Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens?” in *Patrologie et œcumenisme. Recueil d'études* [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990] 216).

<sup>32</sup> Among the scholastic theologians and commentators to whom de Régnon turns are Anselm, Richard of St. Victor, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Scotus, Catejan, Suarez, and Tiphanius. It is these scholastics whom de Régnon quotes in his fifth *étude*, the counterpart to his first volume's study of the “Greek” concept of the Trinity. Moreover, he devotes his entire second volume to scholastic theories of the processions, a volume which corresponds to the lengthy third and fourth volumes on “la dogmatique grecque.”

the crucial *études* four, five, and six of the first volume, the nuanced and troubled development of trinitarian terminology between Latin-speaking patristic writers and Greek-speaking patristic writers. Given the proximity of this distinction to the one he traces pages later, it is only too easy for the reader to imagine, when de Régnon turns to describe the “Greek” and “Latin” trinitarian concepts, that he contrasts still the two patristic groups so lately in question.

Even if the reader does manage to remember every time de Régnon references the “Latin” approach that he really means the scholastic one, the problem still remains that he rarely, and even then but briefly, defines to whom he intends the “Greek” heading to point. The common assumption about the “de Régnon paradigm”—that the term “Greek” refers to those fourth-century Greek theologians whom he most frequently cites—while understandable, does not grasp the greater breadth that de Régnon means for this term to encompass. To de Régnon’s mind, the fourth-century Greek authors offer the richest expression of an approach that reaches centuries before and beyond them in both the Latin-speaking and Greek-speaking worlds.<sup>33</sup> De Régnon judges that the theological approach beginning with the divine persons was a natural response to the demands of Christian apology, first in response to Judaism, which claimed only one God, and then to the assaults of Sabellianism, which also stressed a single divinity. Only with the Arian controversy did certain theologians begin to habituate their thought to considering the divine nature *in se* in order to make then crucial arguments for divine unity.<sup>34</sup> Yet while glimpses of the second *visée*, considering the divine nature directly, do appear in the patristic period, de Régnon considers that it did not fully flower until the scholastic period. So what de Régnon terms the “Greek” approach actually encompasses all those “anténicéens” theologians, eastern and western, whom de Régnon mentions in

<sup>33</sup> He explains that he calls this approach “Greek” because, “although one also encounters it in the most ancient Latins, it was above all cultivated by the Greek Doctors” (“parce que, bien qu’on la rencontre dans les plus anciens Latins, elle a été surtout exploitée par les Docteurs grecs,” 1.428). His reasons for focusing on the fourth-century Greek theologians may be surmised: his own polemical concern, to present an alternate system of reflection to neo-Scholasticism, encourages him to look beyond the familiar Latin authors of the Christian West; the polemical concerns of the fourth century, when the crises of heresy swelled the hottest and the trinitarian formulas were finally set, further determined his selection of this century as the richest moment for reflection. See also 1.127.

<sup>34</sup> In his third and fourth volumes, devoted entirely to “la dogmatique grecque,” de Régnon offers further explanations for the allure of this particular period. He there traces distinctions within the fourth-century Greek theologians, between the “école Alexandrine” and the “école d’Antioche.” While the Alexandrine school continues firmly in accordance with the first *visée*, the Antiochene theologians begin to tend, in their responses to the Arian crisis, toward the second *visée*, toward considering the divine nature in itself: “L’école d’Alexandrie demeure fidèle à la méthode primitive malgré l’abus sacrilège des ariens, et distingue le plus possible les rôles des personnes divines. L’école d’Antioche, pour fortifier le dogme de la consubstantialité, insiste surtout sur l’unité divine de substance et d’opération. L’école scolastique adopte plus résolument encore ce point de départ” (3.145). Straddling as it does the two *visées*, the Antiochene school becomes, for de Régnon, “le lien entre la dogmatique orientale et la dogmatique occidentale” (3.142). As I shall explain below, the “école d’Antioche” gains this intermediary position through its influence on Augustine.

passing as part of the “tradition primitive.” The “Greek” approach also includes all the prescholastic Latin fathers, whom de Régnon passes over, recognizing only that they largely imported or inherited the rich trinitarian reflection arising in the heretical hotbed to the East.<sup>35</sup> So de Régnon can speak of “la patristique,” “les Docteurs,” or “les Pères,” in sweeping abstraction for, to his mind, they all fall under the broad heading “Greek.”

The headings “Latin” and “Greek” are not meant, then, to delimit the groups they describe, so much as to point, as a useful convention and a means of identification, to the chief examples that he selects to illuminate two essentially conceptual approaches to the Trinity. Thus he celebrates how certain “Greek” thinkers embrace the “Latin” approach, even as he lauds those “Latin” thinkers who show elements of the “Greek” approach.<sup>36</sup> While de Régnon does truly wish to acquaint his readers with the richness of earlier trinitarian reflection, the goal behind this presentation remains a conceptual one, namely the recognition, through this diversity, of divine mystery. In line with this larger conceptual aim, de Régnon opens his *Études* with a long exposition on epistemology in which he presents the difficulty the mind faces in apprehending the complex reality of the Trinity. This particular mystery, de Régnon explains, with its three persons, one nature, affords the mind two possible starting places for rational reflection, either with the persons or the nature. In providing this philosophical framework long before he introduces the headings “Greek” and “Latin” to illustrate it, de Régnon shows that his ultimate concern is to present the two approaches as conceptual possibilities far more than descriptions of particular theological groups (although he does turn to historical groups to illustrate these conceptual approaches). What matters is not which thinkers adhered to which approach and at what moment in time but the fact that both approaches exist and that, taken together, they point to the mystery of the Trinity.

A number of the formulaic, false interpretations now attributed to “de Régnon’s paradigm” actually derive from a misappropriation of the categories “Latin” and “Greek” by later users of the paradigm. First, as I related above, de Régnon does not present Cappadocian theology as the definitive statement of the “Greek” view; it merely offers the most developed and clear explanations of an approach four centuries in the making but equally present in the earlier Latin and Greek Fathers. Second, de Régnon does not champion Augustine as the chief representative of the “Latin” view.<sup>37</sup> In truth, de Régnon attends to Augustine rarely, and only in

<sup>35</sup> De Régnon justifies his silence on Latin patristic theologians: “Les œuvres ecclésiastiques de l’Occident méritent, sans doute, d’être étudiées en elles-mêmes, et pour elles-mêmes. Cependant je ne veux m’en occuper ici qu’au point de vue des lumières qu’elles jettent sur l’étude de la théologie grecque” (3.537). For his views concerning the influence of Greek thought on Latin theologians, see 3.77–78, 3.537–46.

<sup>36</sup> De Régnon cites, among others, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil, Didymus, and John Damascene as those “Greeks” who show traces of the second, the “Latin” *visée* (see 3.255–56, 3.77, 3.142).

<sup>37</sup> De Régnon unequivocally declares Thomas to be the “most illustrious representative” of the “Latin” approach (1.305). Even if Augustine was the first to introduce certain key elements of

passing, throughout the first volume of the *Études*. When he does appear, Augustine is characterized merely as the one who first laid the “seed or, at least, the pretext for the system of certain scholastics.”<sup>38</sup> “Père de la théologie scolastique,” Augustine fathered the “psychological analogy” and introduced rational methods that would be perfected down the lines of those scholastic thinkers with whom de Régnon primarily deals in his discussion of the “Latin” system.<sup>39</sup> De Régnon does deepen his portrait of Augustine in the third and fourth volumes of the *Études*, where he presents Augustine as the bridge that links the “Greek” thought that so influenced him (through the Antiochene school) with the scholastic thinkers whom Augustine would influence.<sup>40</sup> By accentuating the scholastic debt to Augustine, de Régnon subtly argues for the scholastic debt to the Greek Fathers who had such an impact on Augustine’s thought. Third, de Régnon does not claim Gregory of Nyssa’s *Ad Ablabium* as the representative statement of the Cappadocian or “Greek” view. We can only marvel at how the receiving tradition moved from de Régnon’s position on this text to arrive at the current “stranglehold” of *Ad Ablabium* on trinitarian reflection.<sup>41</sup> While de Régnon does quote large portions of the text, these quotations fall chiefly under his discussion of the “difficulties” encountered by the “Greek” approach, and de Régnon often follows these quotations with discussions of how Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus can be seen to “correct” the errors Gregory of Nyssa made therein.<sup>42</sup> To these three, specific misappropriations at the core of “de

the “Latin” approach in the West—such as his tendency to consider nature on its own terms, his introduction of the “psychological analogy,” his distinction between absolute and relative subsistence, and his looking to the divine operations for a formal reason for the processions—de Régnon is quite clear about the fact that Augustine cannot be identified with the “Latin” approach: “Il ne faudrait pas croire cependant que l’influence de saint Grégoire et de saint Augustin ait inversé le sens du courant traditionnel. Sans doute ils ont assoupli la pensée, ils lui ont fait prendre l’habitude de considérer la nature divine en elle-même, comme on le constate en lisant Cyrille d’Alexandrie. Cependant toute l’école grecque est restée fidèle au concept des premières siècles. . . . On peut dire la même chose des Latins, jusqu’à la Scolastique” (1.263).

<sup>38</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.262: “Nous trouvons dans le grand Docteur de l’Occident le germe ou, du moins, le prétexte du système de certains scolastiques, distinguant en Dieu la subsistance absolue et les subsistances relatives.”

<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that de Régnon stresses the rational, systematic aspects of Augustine’s work in order to indicate how he is a precursor of the scholastic system he prepares. Thus, de Régnon asserts, “le but principal que se propose saint Augustin est d’établir sur des bases théologiques la dogmatique de la Trinité, en s’appliquant la raison à bien définir les termes et à fortifier les arguments” (3.416).

<sup>40</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 4.356: “Lorsque nous avons commencé à étudier la théorie grecque du Saint-Esprit, j’ai comparé cette théorie et celle que la scolastique a reçue de saint Augustin aux deux branches d’une lyre qui s’écartent d’une base commune . . . ces deux branches se rapportent et se touchent au sommet. C’est à saint Augustin lui-même que nous nous adresserons pour établir cette concorde.”

<sup>41</sup> I borrow Sarah Coakley’s apt phrasing for the phenomenal influence of this single text on recent textbook accounts of trinitarianism (“Introduction,” in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 3).

<sup>42</sup> See 1.380, 381, 382, 385. In fact, de Régnon is often none too complimentary with regard to *Ad Ablabium*. Again and again, he characterizes it as “singulier,” an ambiguous qualifier, and he refers to its logic as “outré” and “bizarre.” He explains that he cites it at such length only “de

Régnon's paradigm," many others could be added. Yet even these three hint at the distance between the *Études* and "de Régnon's paradigm." This distance becomes only more apparent as we turn to consider de Régnon's own portrait of "Latin" and "Greek" theologies.

### ■ The Paradigm de Régnon Wrote

De Régnon's substantive portrait of "Greek" and "Latin" trinitarian theologies corresponds directly to his aim to open the increasingly entrenched neo-Scholasticism to conversation with other systems of thought.<sup>43</sup> For all that de Régnon does *distinguish* between "Latin" and "Greek" trinitarian systems, according to how they begin with reflection on nature or persons, he most emphatically does not *oppose* them.<sup>44</sup> To oppose them, as later recipients and users of the paradigm have done, would have gone against his overarching aim. Since he saw that "Latin" theology needed to be broadened, revived, even challenged by other, older ways of talking about the divine, de Régnon used his paradigm as a means to bring the earlier Doctors of the Church into conversation with then dominant scholastic thinkers, not to divide the two schools further. And while he does characterize the two systems as demonstrating inverse approaches to the Trinity, de Régnon nevertheless strives toward a rapprochement of this difference by tracing the underlying harmony that links the two seemingly disparate schools of thought. "Dogmatic theories," he teaches, "contain two elements: a theological element, provided by revelation, and a philosophical explanation, provided by reason. While the faith element remains always the same, the rationally construed system can vary according to the differing

peur qu'on ne m'accuse d'avoir travesti la pensée d'un si grand homme" (1.377). If others later attributed to it a representative quality, it was not in this light that de Régnon presented it. He rather remarks on the awkwardness of its "interprétation inexacte" of the Trinity (1.381), the unsuitability of saying "plusieurs hommes" (1.380), and its "bizarre et fausse" discussion of the term godhead (1.481). Overall de Régnon rejects the text as manifesting "un Réalisme qui paraît outré" (1.377). To his mind, this interpretation "était dangereuse; car elle semblait réduire l'unité divine à une simple unité spécifique, détruisant ainsi le mystère même de la Trinité" (1.380).

<sup>43</sup> De Régnon ascribes both theological and pastoral benefits to this project, hoping that it will "aiguillonner l'ardeur des théologiens" and "rajeunir . . . le peuple chrétien" (1.330, 365). De Régnon's interest in reaching the "peuple chrétien," as well as his conscious intent to distance his work from that of official Roman neo-Scholasticism, can be seen in his decision to publish his work in French, rather than Latin. A contemporary review of the first volume of the *Études*, in the Catholic publication *The Month*, marvels rather extensively at "this departure from the more obvious course of proceedings," which would have been to publish in "the language of the schools" rather than "that of his fellow-countrymen" (no. 332 [1892] 287).

<sup>44</sup> De Régnon explicitly positions himself against theologians who cling to narrow, oppositional formulae—a strange position for him to claim, indeed, who has so often been blamed for just that inclination: "Laissons aux écoles les débats contradictoires; car la contradiction provient de l'élément humain qui, en systématisant le dogme, en rend la formule trop étroite" (1.49). The fact that de Régnon declares himself against that very type of dualistic opposition in which "his" paradigm has been reproduced makes all the more pointed Barnes's observation that "this penchant for polar categories reveals something about methodological choices systematians have made in this century" (Barnes, "Augustine," 239).



genius of each Doctor.”<sup>45</sup> Claiming a shared, revelatory origin behind both “Latin” and “Greek” trinitarian theologies, de Régnon celebrates their differences and invites the reader to come “suck the same dogmatic marrow throughout.”<sup>46</sup> This plea for unity should not be confused with the false uniformity he earlier rebuked, in which neo-Thomists bent disparate theologies to the pattern of scholastic thought.<sup>47</sup> In his juxtaposition of “Latin” and “Greek” approaches, de Régnon neither subsumes the tradition’s diversity of views into a false unity, nor forsakes unity in the creation of an oppositional diversity. Instead he stresses the unity that persists across the diversity of the tradition. “From Thebes to Athens and from Athens to Thebes,” he reminds his reader, “the route is the same; yet to travel in one direction, or to travel in the other is not exactly the same thing.”<sup>48</sup> Presenting the two systems side by side, de Régnon revels in the diversity of scholastic and patristic views, even while underlining that the two systems share the same revelatory road and therefore deserve equal, close attention.

De Régnon pushes this rapprochement between the two systems yet further: he not only shows the “Latin” and “Greek” approaches to be essentially united in their shared project and revelatory source but also insists that they are necessarily complementary in light of the rational limit imposed on any inquiry into the divine mysteries.<sup>49</sup> For all his interest in showing that the “faith element” behind the two approaches remains ever the same—and thus invites consideration of both

<sup>45</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.251: “Or les théories dogmatiques contiennent deux éléments: un élément théologique fourni par la révélation, une explication philosophique élaborée par la raison. L’élément de foi est toujours le même, mais la systématisation rationnelle peut varier avec les génies différentes des Docteurs.” Because the “faith element” remains always the same, de Régnon can later characterize even his first volume, with its two diverse portraits, as showing how “la plus complète communauté de foi a toujours régnée entre les Églises orientale et occidentale” (3.3, emphasis mine).

<sup>46</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.49: “Sucer partout la même moelle dogmatique.” Yves Congar, in his *Je crois en l’Esprit Saint* (vol. 3; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980), particularly lauds de Régnon’s desire to show the continuity of faith between the two systems, exclaiming, “Nous lui devons tous beaucoup” (16). Given de Régnon’s interest in tracing the unity between the two systems, it is notable that, among the “Greek” authors he quotes, Gregory of Nazianzus figures most prominently, since de Régnon names Gregory “le grand scolastique grec” (1.417) and often describes him as being in harmony with the “Latins” in that his thought “dérive vers la considération de la nature visée en elle-même” (1.257).

<sup>47</sup> Note also that while the neo-Thomists he criticizes attend to the Cappadocians in order to prove Thomas the *nec plus ultra*, de Régnon presents the Cappadocians with the opposite intent, in order to prove the necessity of looking *beyond* Thomas.

<sup>48</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.263: “De Thèbes à Athènes et d’Athènes à Thèbes le chemin est le même; mais le parcourir dans un sens et le parcourir dans l’autre ne sont pas choses identiques.”

<sup>49</sup> De Halleux, a perceptive reader of de Régnon, also recognizes that de Régnon “parlait plutôt en termes de complémentarité . . . dans un esprit remarquablement œcuménique,” insofar as he “considère déjà ‘les Églises grecque et latine comme deux sœurs’” (André de Halleux, “‘Hypostase’ et ‘Personne’ dans la formation du dogme trinitaire (ca. 375–381),” in *Patrologie et œcuménisme*, 213). He also notes, elsewhere, that “le P. de Régnon s’était soigneusement gardé d’opposer irréductiblement deux approches complémentaires du mystère trinitaire” (de Halleux, “Personnalisme,” 216).

systems—he proves only the more interested in showing how the limitations of the second element, the “element provided by reason,” necessitate consideration of both systems at once. “However beautiful one system may be,” he explains, “it cannot embrace the full splendor of the revelation.”<sup>50</sup> Instead, he stresses that the revelation always exceeds and surpasses the capacities of any one thinker, any single system, even Thomas’s system, for the divine mystery remains beyond the power of the reason to systematize or comprehend. “In truth,” he insists, “the created intellect cannot completely pierce the divine darkness, and its last word must be an admission of its ignorance.”<sup>51</sup>

While de Régnon presents this final admission of ignorance arising at the limit of human reason as a truth of all theological reflection, he pointedly directs this caution against the rationally powerful system of scholastic thought. In fact, nearly every reminder of reason’s limits falls within one of his discussions of the “Latin” system. So, in one instance, having conceded that “we must admire the methodical spirit that introduced rational links between all theological propositions,” and having concurred that “the incomparable glory of Scholasticism is to have thus put reason in the service of faith,” de Régnon hastens to add his caution regarding the limits of even this most authoritative, reasoned system: “But, since the revealed doctrines are incomprehensible, we must confess that while we can push back the point of mystery, we shall always finish at this point upon the close of any systematic explanation.”<sup>52</sup> No system, not even Thomas’s system, de Régnon somewhat daringly insists, can have the last word on divine mystery.

To reinforce these cautions regarding divine mystery and the limits of reason, de Régnon structures his portraits of “Greek” and “Latin” theologies to reveal how they encounter the divine mystery in complementary and inverse ways.<sup>53</sup> After briefly tracing each system’s central organizing principle, according to its beginning with reflection on persons or nature, he structures his discussions around the complementary, inverse “Advantages” and “Difficulties” each conceptual framework creates. Not surprisingly, given the apophatic sensibility of his thought,

<sup>50</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.49: “Quelque beau que soit un système, il ne peut embrasser la révélation dans toute sa splendeur.”

<sup>51</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.301: “À la vérité, l’intelligence créée ne peut percer complètement la divine obscurité, et il faut que son dernier mot soit l’aveu de son ignorance.”

<sup>52</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.48: “Certes il faut louer l’esprit méthodique qui introduit un lien rationnel entre toutes les propositions théologiques, et l’incomparable gloire de la Scolastique est d’avoir mis ainsi la raison au service de la foi. Mais, puisque les dogmes révélés sont incompréhensibles, on doit confesser que, si l’on peut reculer le point mystérieux, on finira toujours par le rencontrer au bout de toutes les explications systématiques.” See also 1.313.

<sup>53</sup> De Régnon shows how each framework encounters obscurity and clarity in inverse ways: “Le mystère se présente sous deux forme différentes.—L’unité de substance divine: voilà qui est clair pour le Latin; mais comment un seul Dieu peut-il y avoir trois substances différentes? Voilà l’obscurité.—Chaque personne est Dieu: voilà pour le Grec ce qui ressort clairement de la révélation; mais comment la même substance est-elle contenue dans ces trois réalités subsistantes? Voilà l’obscurité” (1.434).

de Régnon devotes the greatest attention to the difficulties. “The difficulties prove to us,” he explains, “as we should expect, that this manifestation is only partial and allows us to glimpse but one side of the incomprehensible reality.”<sup>54</sup> Although he ascribes difficulties to both the “Greek” and “Latin” systems, his presentation particularly emphasizes the difficulties that arise in the scholastic system. For while he shows how the “Greek” approach resolves the difficulties that vex the scholastic system, he actually resolves the difficulties of the “Greek” approach from within.<sup>55</sup> This presentation, favoring as it does the advantages of the “Greek” approach, confirms his striking intent to prove, against the spirit of his age, the severe limitations of the scholastic system when taken alone. In fact, de Régnon proclaims that this daring exposure of the orthodox, authoritative viewpoint is the very duty of positive theology, namely, “to pierce holes in the walls of the School and to enable light to enter from every point on the horizon. By this light, we better understand how far the thrice-holy mystery dwells above our understanding.”<sup>56</sup> Piercing holes in the dominant school of his time, de Régnon invites readers to look beyond the difficulties of the scholastic system, to consider also the advantages and difficulties of another view of the Trinity.<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, de Régnon’s complementary presentation of “Greek” and “Latin” trinitarian systems aims not to resolve the divine mystery—as if the two, taken together, could solve such a mystery—but rather to reinforce the recognition of this mystery.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, despite his careful exposition of the two systems’ theories of the Trinity, de Régnon frames his portraits with reminders that both systems penetrate only some part of the divine darkness. In a revealing image, de Régnon

<sup>54</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.328: “Les difficultés nous prouvent, comme on devait s’y attendre, que cette manifestation n’est que partielle, et ne laisse entrevoir qu’un côté de l’incompréhensible réalité.”

<sup>55</sup> “Nous venons de voir,” he summarizes this complementarity, “comment est splendide la théorie grecque, et comment elle évite tous les obstacles de la théorie scolastique. À son tour, elle rencontre une difficulté toute contraire. Si le danger de concevoir la nature avant la personnalité est d’absorber la Trinité dans l’Unité divine, le danger de concevoir la personne avant la nature est de diviser l’Unité en trois individus séparés” (1.366). But, where one would then expect him to explain how the “Latin” system offers a corrective to this problem from the “Greek” approach, he instead enters into a lengthy explanation of how the “Greek” theory of circumincession “évite cette erreur” (1.413). Thus, in the final count of “Advantages” and “Difficulties,” the “Greek” system seems to come out ahead, offering solutions to its own difficulties as well as to those encountered by the “Latin” system.

<sup>56</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 3.564: “Le rôle de la théologie positive est de percer des ouvertures dans les murs de l’École, et [d’]y faire entrer la lumière de tous les points de l’horizon. À cette lumière, on comprend mieux combien le mystère trois fois saint est au-dessus de toutes nos conceptions.”

<sup>57</sup> See 1.49: “Veut-on connaître du plus auguste de nos mystères tout ce qu’il nous est donné d’atteindre, il est bon de ne pas s’inféoder à un système particulier, mais de puiser dans chacun quelque trait de lumière.”

<sup>58</sup> De Régnon’s insistence on mystery continues through the third and fourth volumes of the *Études*. There he reveals the ultimate aim of his diverse portrait of “Greek” theologies as being the reinforcement of mystery: “cette variété de méthodes nous montre, mieux que toute explication, combien le mystère de la Trinité est impénétrable” (3.144).

describes how each system has “a luminous side and a shadowed side, like a column, which cannot be illumined by the sun without casting its shadow.”<sup>59</sup> This rich image points to de Régnon’s own design for his *Études*: like two columns, de Régnon places his portraits of “Latin” and “Greek” trinitarian systems back to back, to signal in each the shadows and brilliances that arise as the light of understanding inversely strikes and shadows their surfaces. Seen in this way, the way he intended, his paradigmatic portraits of “Latin” and “Greek” theologies seem no longer to aim to impose certainty through systematic and totalizing explanation. Rather, his presentation of the two complementary systems enforces the recognition of divine darkness through the two systems’ mutually effacing explanations. De Régnon intends his paradigm to offer an apophatic caution to the theologian who would presume to describe the Trinity or, even more emphatically, to the school that would claim its rational system as final and authoritative.<sup>60</sup> Let me quote at length, for its beauty and its clarity, one of de Régnon’s articulations of how the two systems, by their mutual effacement, draw the reader into the divine darkness:

Both err, by assuming a clarity incompatible with the veil of mystery. . . . For this reason, it is good to study, at once, these two different theories. It allows us to draw near to the divine mystery along two inverse paths, to approach this mystery from two opposing sides. Each theory corrects the other. Each teaches the other that it is incomplete, that it remains outside of the divine mystery. Each one, so to speak, holds a hand out to the other across the darkness; and so each draws each into the bosom of the Unknown.<sup>61</sup>

So de Régnon, through his *Études*, holds out his hand to the reader, to draw the reader through the false light of certainty into the darkness proper to the divine mystery.

<sup>59</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.301: “Il y a dans toute théorie de la Sainte Trinité, un côté lumineux et un côté obscur, comme une colonne ne peut être éclairée par le soleil sans projeter son ombre.”

<sup>60</sup> De Régnon explains the apophatic dimension of the paradigm’s inverse portraits: “Je n’ai pas commencé de penser à l’Unité, que la Trinité me baigne dans sa splendeur. Je n’ai pas commencé de penser à la Trinité que l’Unité me ressaisit” (1.107). Although later readers seem to have passed over the strongly apophatic dimension of de Régnon’s *Études*, Lossky quotes this passage precisely as a proof that “on est obligé de faire appel à la théologie apophatique afin de se libérer des concepts propres à la pensée” (44).

<sup>61</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.430: “Toutes les deux, elles pèchent par un excès de netteté incompatible avec les voiles du mystère . . . . Voilà pourquoi il était bon d’étudier à la fois ces deux théories si différentes. C’était se rapprocher du mystère par deux voies inverses, et l’aborder par deux côtés opposés. Chaque théorie corrige l’autre. Chacune notifie à l’autre qu’elle est incomplète, qu’elle est hors du mystère. Chacune, pour parler ainsi, tend la main à l’autre à travers les ténèbres, pour s’attirer mutuellement au sein de l’Impénétrable.”

## ■ Conclusion

Where de Régnon knit together “Latin” and “Greek” approaches to the Trinity in order to inspire a properly humble view of theology’s capacities at a moment when Roman theologians were becoming increasingly rigid and assured, those who came later would reiterate only division and false certainty. Later readers and, especially, readers of those readers would find in “de Régnon’s paradigm” a very different lesson than the one he meant to confer. No longer would de Régnon’s paradigmatic portrayal of the two systems evade theological certainty, it would come to impose certainty through a paradigm that dissolves the nuances and divergences of theological reflection into a pat and overly simplifying formula.

How, then, can we account for the distance between the paradigm that arose and the one de Régnon presents in the *Études*? Barnes offers one provocative answer in his diagnosis of the influence of “de Régnon’s paradigm.” He suggests, “We are almost to the point where we can say that modern theology, needing the doctrinal opposition between ‘Greek’ and ‘Latin’ trinitarian theologies, invented it.” Barnes goes on to propose, “Rather than treating de Régnon’s paradigm as a description of fourth- and fifth-century trinitarian theologies, we should imagine it as a symptom or a structural prerequisite of modern thinking about trinitarian theologies.”<sup>62</sup> In light of my analysis above, I judge we should push Barnes’s diagnosis even further and categorically declare that it was not de Régnon who created the rigid opposition between the two systems at all, but those who came after him. Needing this opposition, they scripted it into “de Régnon’s paradigm.”

Ironically enough, some of the goals of de Régnon’s *Études*, seen in this way, prove not wholly incompatible with the goals of the new historiography discussed in this issue of *HTR*. Surprising resonances emerge between the two projects, broadly sketched. For de Régnon aims ultimately to moderate—not to enforce—stark dualities through his complementary presentation of “Latin” and “Greek” theologies. Indeed, his subtle account of the relations among the different Greek Fathers, and between them and Augustine, suggests that he might well concur with Ayres’s characterization of their “pro-Nicene” unity. Second, de Régnon aims to balance overly cataphatic, rational approaches to the Trinity with his persistent reminders of the apophatic, the perdurance of mystery. And, finally, he argues for the ecumenical and theological necessity of bringing about a rapprochement between two divided sides of reflection, in this case “Latin” and “Greek” approaches to the Trinity. To be sure, de Régnon does not go so far as to efface this duality altogether; it does run persistently throughout the first volume of his *Études*. But, as we have seen, he frames this duality in such a way as to temper its rigidity, encouraging his readers to see the complementary and necessary relation between the two sides, in light of the mystery of the Trinity. This subtlety is far more than “de Régnon’s

<sup>62</sup> Michel René Barnes, “The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community* (ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones; London: Routledge, 1998) 61.

paradigm” can boast. Ceasing to view de Régnon as the villain who rent East from West, we might instead hear him as an ally, counseling us away from the evils of that paradigm for which he has been blamed, but did not create:

Let us leave behind these divergences and rival fluctuations of language. Let us not be Sabellians, defending the one against the three by a confusion that suppresses distinction. Nor let us be Arians, upholding the three against the one by a division that destroys unity. . . . These are the very tricks of the devil, who plays wickedly with us, as with an unsteady balance.<sup>63</sup>

It is time to right the scales and free de Régnon from that divisive paradigm too long called his, to welcome him instead into the more balanced place in the tradition that he so richly deserves.

<sup>63</sup> De Régnon, *Études*, 1.210: “Laissons donc toutes ces déviations et ces oscillations rivales de langage. Ne soyons pas sabelliens, en défendant le ‘un’ contre le ‘trois’ par une confusion qui supprime la distinction. Ne soyons pas ariens, en soutenant le ‘trois’ contre le ‘un’ par une division qui détruit l’unité. . . . Ce sont là enfantillages du démon qui joue méchamment avec nous comme une balance folle” (quoting Gregory of Nazianzus, *In supremum valedictio*, 42.16).

# Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus\*

Christopher A. Beeley

*Yale University Divinity School*

Gregory Nazianzen's doctrine of the Trinity has had a most unusual reception in modern times. Since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 Gregory has been honored with the title "the Theologian" for his definitive teaching on the Trinity in the late-fourth century. His influence was then strongly felt in the christological developments that continued through the eighth century, and his stature in Greek Christian tradition is comparable only to that of Augustine in the West, although his influence is felt there as well. Yet despite his acknowledged ecumenical significance, Gregory's theological achievement has often eluded modern patristic scholars and systematic theologians. Even the most recent wave of specialized work on Gregory and the current synoptic studies of patristic doctrine have tended to overlook major aspects of his work. One of the most acute points of confusion in current scholarship—and a matter of no little significance for Nicene theology—is Gregory's doctrine of divine causality and the monarchy of God the Father within the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> The recent debate over this topic, I would suggest, reflects the extent to which Gregory's doctrine has yet to be assimilated in contemporary historical

\* Thanks to Lewis Ayres and Rowan Greer for comments on a draft of this article, and to Michel Barnes and Verna Harrison for discussion of an earlier version presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the North American Patristics Society.

<sup>1</sup> In Gregory's usage αἰτία, αἴτιος, and αἴτιον are virtually interchangeable terms for "cause," and often appear together with the closely related term ἀρχή (source, origin, first principle; also chronological beginning, office, or authority). See John P. Egan, "αἴτιος/'Author', αἰτία/'Cause' and ἀρχή/'Origin': Synonyms in Selected Texts of Gregory Nazianzen," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997) 102–7. On Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity, see now my *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

and systematic theology. In this article I will seek to clarify Gregory's doctrine of divine causality in light of its current reception and to give some indication of its wider significance.

## ■ A Scholarly Puzzle

Since the 1970s scholars have been puzzled by the variety of ways in which Gregory speaks of divine causality, particularly in a handful of passages in the *Theological Orations* (*Or.* 27–31). One of the most frequently cited is *Oration* 31.14, a passage in which Gregory defends the unity of the Trinity against certain objections by his Eunomian opponents. The recent English translation of Lionel Wickham highlights the very ambiguities under consideration:

We have one God because there is a single Godhead. Though there are three objects of belief, they derive from the single whole and have reference to it. They do not have degrees of being God or degrees of priority over against one another. They are not sundered in will or divided in power. You cannot find there any of the properties inherent in things divisible. To express it succinctly, the Godhead exists undivided in beings divided. It is as if there were a single intermingling of light, which existed in three mutually connected Suns. When we look at the Godhead, the primal cause, the sole sovereignty, we have a mental picture of the single whole, certainly. But when we look at the three in whom the Godhead exists, and at those who derive their timeless and equally glorious being from the primal cause, we have three objects of worship.<sup>2</sup>

In the final two sentences Gregory seems to be saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all derive from a common First Cause (ἡ πρώτη αἰτία), which is the Divinity itself (or the “Godhead,” ἡ θεότης). This statement echoes Gregory's point at the beginning of the passage that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all derive from “the single whole,” which presumably refers also to the Divinity. Thus in this passage Gregory is thought to be identifying the Divinity as the primal cause of the three persons of the Trinity and the ground of the divine unity.

Yet elsewhere in the *Theological Orations*, Gregory speaks of “God” (θεός) as “the creative and sustaining cause of all things,”<sup>3</sup> the first cause, which the angels encircle<sup>4</sup> and for which all rational natures long.<sup>5</sup> In other passages, he ascribes causality specifically to the Father, and he even argues that the Son and the Spirit are “less” than the Father in terms of causality, although not in terms of being or

<sup>2</sup> *Or.* 31.14. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (intro. and commentary Frederick W. Norris; trans. Lionel Wickham [*Or.* 28–31] and Frederick Williams [*Or.* 27]; Leiden: Brill, 1991) 286; reprinted in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (intro., trans. [*Or.* 28–31; *Epistulae* 101–2], and notes Lionel Wickham; trans. Frederick Williams [*Or.* 27]; Popular Patristic Series; Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2002) 127–28.

<sup>3</sup> *Or.* 28.6.

<sup>4</sup> *Or.* 28.31.

<sup>5</sup> *Or.* 28.13.



nature.<sup>6</sup> Yet again, Gregory argues that God has no cause: “What among all things that exist has no cause (ἀνείτιον)? Divinity. For no one can speak of the cause of God (αἰτία θεοῦ), otherwise it would be prior to God.”<sup>7</sup> And finally, as if combining these last two points, Gregory writes that God is the cause of all things but has no cause himself.<sup>8</sup> Adding to the confusion is that in this passage (Or. 31.33), he seems to be rejecting the image (εἰκόν) of the sun casting its sunbeams on a wall or in water as an adequate model or illustration (ὑπόδειγμα) of the Trinity, because it ascribes causality to the Father; whereas earlier in the series he had employed the image of the sun precisely to argue *for* the causality of the Father.<sup>9</sup> From this puzzling variety of statements scholars have tried to determine whether, for Gregory, divine causality belongs to God the Father uniquely, to God, the Divinity, or the Trinity as a whole, or to none of them.

The current scholarly debate stems from a 1973 article by E. P. Meijering on Gregory’s doctrine of the will.<sup>10</sup> According to Meijering, Gregory’s claim that the Father is greater than the Son as cause but not greater in being is “logically untenable.”<sup>11</sup> The basis for Meijering’s judgment is a rather strained comparison of Gregory with Plotinus and Athanasius. For Plotinus, the fact that the first Principle (the One) eternally generates and thus causes the second Principle (unchangeable being) makes the second Principle ontologically inferior to the first; whereas for Athanasius, the Son is not caused by the Father at all but is co-eternal, ὁμοούσιος, and therefore completely equal with the Father.<sup>12</sup> Meijering evaluates Gregory’s doctrine on the assumption that Plotinian subordinationism and Athanasian equality are the only two logical positions available for describing causal relations within the Trinity. Either the Father is the cause of the Son, making the Son ontologically inferior, or else the Father does not cause the Son and they are purely equal. Gregory’s claim that the Father causes the Son *and* that they are ontologically equal therefore fails by trying to combine two mutually exclusive options.<sup>13</sup> His combination of the categories of αἰτία and οὐσία, moreover, is arbitrary and serves

<sup>6</sup> Or. 29.3, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Or. 30.2.

<sup>8</sup> Or. 31.33.

<sup>9</sup> Or. 29.3.

<sup>10</sup> E. P. Meijering, “The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 27 (1973) 224–34; repr. in idem, *God, Being, History: Studies in Patristic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: American Elsevier, 1975) 103–13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>12</sup> Though it is a widely held perception among twentieth-century theologians, the claim that Athanasius teaches pure divine equality apart from causality is simply unfounded. For an emphasis on the priority of the Father and the derivation of the Son, see *Orationes contra Arianos* 1.16, 58; 3.6; *Epistulae ad Serapionem* 1.14, 16; and John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004) 238–45.

<sup>13</sup> Meijering, “Doctrine of the Will,” 233.

as an example of the “devastating storms” that Harnack believed had arisen from the alliance of Christian orthodoxy and Greek philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Meijering’s analysis and the larger assumptions on which it is based have held considerable sway in recent decades. In his landmark commentary on the *Theological Orations*, Frederick Norris notes John Meyendorff’s claim that for Gregory the Father is both cause and first principle of the divine nature,<sup>15</sup> yet he favors instead the analysis of Meijering, and credits him with spotting “perhaps the most glaring error in Gregory’s understanding of God.”<sup>16</sup> Around the same time, two influential, synoptic works offered similar assessments. R. P. C. Hanson’s monumental study of the fourth century interprets Gregory as locating the source of the Trinity in the divine nature, from which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all derive—a point that reflects Hanson’s acceptance of the conventional view that Cappadocian doctrine is characterized primarily by the distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις.<sup>17</sup> Although he acknowledges Gregory’s claim that the Father is the cause of the Son,<sup>18</sup> Hanson is skeptical that this claim could be compatible with traditional pro-Nicene doctrine. Accordingly, he too cites with approval Meijering’s comparison of Gregory to Plotinus.<sup>19</sup> In his systematic treatment of patristic doctrine, Thomas Torrance argues that Gregory succeeds in opposing the monarchy of the Father and any sense of causal relations within the Trinity—an unfortunate remnant of Origenist subordinationism that had lingered in Basil and Gregory of Nyssa—by adopting the view of Athanasius that the three persons are entirely equal.<sup>20</sup> Although their conclusions are quite different, Torrance operates with the same assumption as Meijering does, namely that causal subordinationism and causeless equality are the only two viable options.

Further attempts to solve the problem have come from John Egan and Richard Cross. In a paper from the 1991 Oxford Patristics Conference Egan assesses ancient and modern arguments both for and against Gregory’s reference to the Father as

<sup>14</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (3 vols.; 5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1931–1932) 2:267. Meijering, “Doctrine of the Will,” 234. Although Meijering brushes it aside at the end, his article is heavily influenced by Harnack’s understanding of the relationship between Nicene orthodoxy and Greek philosophy (see the opening statement on p. 224).

<sup>15</sup> *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (2d rev. ed.; New York: Fordham University Press, 1983) 183.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, *Faith*, 45 n. 215; see also 136–37, 176, and 199, commenting on *Orations* 29.3; 30.16; and 31.14. For an indication of the same view prior to Meijering’s article, based on *Or.* 29.2–3, see Norris, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Doctrine of Jesus Christ” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1970) 116–18.

<sup>17</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 710, reading *Or.* 23.7 and 29.2.

<sup>18</sup> In *Or.* 40.43 and 30.7.

<sup>19</sup> Hanson, *Search*, 713 and n. 143, reading *Or.* 30.8–10.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 1988) 319–22. Richard Cross, “Divine Monarchy in Gregory of Nazianzus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006) 105–16, at 108.

first cause in *Oration* 31.14.<sup>21</sup> While Egan concludes that this passage does refer to the Father as cause, he agrees with Meijering and Norris that Gregory's doctrine of the causality of the Father is on the whole "philosophically arbitrary."<sup>22</sup> Focusing on the same text, Richard Cross argues just the reverse. Against Torrance, he maintains that Gregory does teach that the Father causes the Son in some sense; though he argues that the term "monarchy" refers not to the Father's unique activity, but to the indivisible divine essence as a whole, typically in its actions toward creation.<sup>23</sup> However, *pace* Egan, he argues that in *Oration* 31.14 Gregory does not speak of the causal priority of the Father (though he does elsewhere), but rather of the causal relation between the divine essence and the three persons.<sup>24</sup> In this way Gregory shows the divine essence to be "coordinatively common" to all three persons, in order to answer Eunomian objections that pro-Nicene doctrine divides the divine essence and is fundamentally tritheistic.<sup>25</sup> In the end Cross cautions against taking this generic sense of causality too seriously. Meanwhile, somewhat independent of this discussion, John McGuckin published an insightful overview of Gregory's trinitarian doctrine, followed by a full-scale intellectual biography.<sup>26</sup> Although at points he speaks of the shared οὐσία as the foundation of the divine unity,<sup>27</sup> and like Hanson and Cross, he tends to identify the monarchy with the divine unity as opposed to the Father,<sup>28</sup> nevertheless McGuckin ultimately emphasizes the causality of the Father as the root of the Trinity and of the structure of the knowledge of God.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the recent studies of fourth-century doctrine by Lewis Ayres and John Behr take different positions on the subject. Ayres follows Egan's assessment of the

<sup>21</sup> John Egan, "Primal Cause and Trinitarian Perichoresis in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration* 31.14," *StPatr* 27 (1993) 21–28. Egan considers Pseudo-Cyril, *apud* John Damascene in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* (ed. Bonifatius Kotter; 6 vols.; Patristische Texte und Studien; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973) 2:29.265–30.274; A. J. Mason, ed., *The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge Patristic Texts; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899) 163, n. on line 6; A. Theodorou, "Light as Image and Symbol in the Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus," [in Greek] *Theologia* 47 (1976) 254—all three commenting on *Or.* 31.14; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 183; John McGuckin, "'Perceiving Light from Light in Light': The Trinitarian Theology of St. Gregory Nazianzen," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994) 7–32; and André de Halleux, "Personalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens? Une mauvaise controverse," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 17 (1986) 286—commenting more broadly.

<sup>22</sup> Egan, "Primal Cause," 28. In a paper from the following Oxford Conference, Egan inclines slightly more toward the monarchy of the Father, citing McGuckin's recent study ("Perceiving Light," 29); though he refrains from committing himself: Egan, "ἀὐτοῦς/'Author'," 106–7 and n. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Cross, "Divine Monarchy," 114, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Thus he interprets *Or.* 29.2 as well.

<sup>25</sup> Cross, "Divine Monarchy," 112–13.

<sup>26</sup> McGuckin, "Perceiving Light," 7–32; idem, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> McGuckin, "Perceiving Light," 21–23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 n. 6; see also 27 and 31. The later biography reiterates this position: e.g., *St Gregory*, 294.

problem, allowing for the possibility of inconsistency on Gregory's part in *Oration* 31.14, though, like Hanson, he seems to consider the divine essence to be the primal cause, from which all three persons derive and to which they return.<sup>30</sup> Thus, according to Ayres, even *Oration* 42.15—one of Gregory's strongest statements of the priority of the Father—speaks of “the persons qua persons continually returning to their source.”<sup>31</sup> Behr's study, which is essentially a serial reading of the *Theological Orations* and the letters to Cledonius,<sup>32</sup> opposes Meijering and follows McGuckin, identifying God the Father as the source and cause of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

### ■ Gregory's Doctrine of Divine Causality

Despite the confused and uncertain state of current scholarship, Gregory's doctrine of divine causality is in fact quite clear and consistent, and it holds a central place in his larger theological system. Much of the difficulty among recent studies appears to stem from an almost exclusive reliance on the *Theological Orations* at the expense of other, equally important texts. Apart from the apparent enigmas in passages like *Oration* 31.14, the *Theological Orations* pose the additional difficulty of not being a sustained, positive exposition of Gregory's doctrine. Organized as a series of responses to objections by Eunomians and Pneumatomachians, they are mainly defensive in character and consist almost entirely of negative argumentation. For a more complete treatment of divine causality (among other subjects),<sup>34</sup> we must therefore look to other texts that bring out more directly the doctrinal commitments that Gregory is defending in the *Theological Orations*.<sup>35</sup> Among Gregory's major statements of trinitarian doctrine,<sup>36</sup> the most straightforward, and probably the most significant, is *Oration* 25.15–18. In the late summer or early fall of 380, shortly

<sup>30</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 244–45; reading *Or.* 23.8; 29.2; and 31.14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 101–2.

<sup>33</sup> Behr, *Nicene Faith*, 343–44, 347–48, 361 n. 49, reading *Or.* 29.2–3 and 31.14.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory's christology and his doctrine of purification and illumination, for example, are also greatly illuminated by reference to other texts.

<sup>35</sup> Although much of Gregory's work takes place in an atmosphere of theological debate, and polemical engagement was a large part of his initial motivation to accept the duties of the priestly office in 362, the differences in this regard between the *Theological Orations* and other texts are often rather pronounced.

<sup>36</sup> Key discussions occur in *Or.* 20.5–12; 23.6–12; 34.8–15; 27–31 (the *Theological Orations*); 25.15–18; 38.3, 7–9 (= 45.3–5), 13 (= 45.9), 15 (= 45.27); 39.11–12; 40.34, 41–43; and 42.15–18; and *Carmen* 1.1.1–3, with shorter or more sporadic passages occurring in *Or.* 2.38; 6.11–13; and 41.8–14. Like the *Theological Orations*, however, *Or.* 38–40 and 42 are also more rhetorically complicated than the others. In *Or.* 38–40 Gregory is addressing a mixed, imperial assembly as the new archbishop, including a group of baptismal candidates who were only recently under the charge of the Homoian Bishop Demophilus. In *Or.* 42 Gregory is defending himself before the bitterly fractured Council of Constantinople, which has rejected his doctrinal platform and now also his leadership as president. References to passages from multiple orations will be listed in

after delivering the *Theological Orations*, Gregory dedicates *Oration* 25 to the Christian philosopher Maximus the Cynic as Maximus is about to return home to Alexandria. Gregory offers the piece both as a gesture of personal gratitude for Maximus's theological assistance, and no doubt also to signal his intention to remain allied with Bishop Peter and the powerful Alexandrian church.<sup>37</sup>

At the climax of the oration, Gregory commissions Maximus to teach the true faith, which he then outlines in a brief creedal statement along with several pages of commentary, ranging from technical matters of trinitarian logic to the ascetical and rhetorical dimensions of right doctrine. The opening section of this statement speaks directly to the subject of divine causality and bears quoting at length.<sup>38</sup> "Define our piety," Gregory tells Maximus, "by teaching the knowledge of:

One God, unbegotten, the Father; and

One begotten Lord, his Son,

referred to as "God" (θεός) when he is mentioned separately, but "Lord" when he is named together with the Father—the first on account of the [divine] nature, the second on account of the monarchy; and

One Holy Spirit, who proceeds (προελθόν) or goes forth (προϊόν) from the Father,

"God" (θεόν) to those who understand properly things proposed to them—combated by the impious but understood by those who are above them, and even professed by those who are more spiritual.<sup>39</sup>

[Teach] also that we must not make the Father subject to [another] source (ὑπὸ ἀρχήν), lest we posit a "first of the First," and thus overturn the [divine] Existence.<sup>40</sup> Nor should we say that the Son or the Holy Spirit is without source (ἀναρχος), lest we take away the Father's special characteristic (τὸ ἴδιον). For they are not without source—and yet in a sense they are without source, which is a paradox. They are not without source with

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chronological, not numerical, order, according to the revised dating of McGuckin (*St. Gregory*, vii–xi and passim).

<sup>37</sup> This gesture would turn out to be the single biggest mistake of Gregory's career. Soon afterward, Maximus portrayed Gregory's commission as an endorsement of his succession to the see of Constantinople. He quickly returned to the capital with a number of Egyptian bishops and the blessing of Bishop Peter, after which the bishops attempted to consecrate him under the cover of night in Gregory's own church. The service was broken up by a group of parishioners who discovered what was happening, but the damage was already done to Gregory's reputation among the other major sees.

<sup>38</sup> I have formatted these opening lines to indicate its creedal structure.

<sup>39</sup> Here Gregory refers to his efforts to defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and to the three groups he has recently addressed: the more radical opponents of the Spirit's divinity, whom he calls "Spirit-fighters" (πνευματομάχοι); those who believe the Spirit is divine but do not confess it publicly (including the late Basil); and those who, like himself, confess the faith openly with the public proclamation of the Trinity. See *Or.* 41.6.

<sup>40</sup> ἵνα μὴ τοῦ πρώτου τι πρώτον εἰσαγάγωμεν, ἐξ οὗ καὶ τὸ εἶναι πρῶτον περιτραπήσεται.

respect to their cause (τῷ αἰτίῳ), for they are from God (ἐκ θεοῦ) even if they are not subsequent to him in time (μετ' αὐτόν), just as light comes from the sun.<sup>41</sup> But they are without source with respect to time, since they are not subject to time.<sup>42</sup>

In this opening section Gregory conspicuously anchors his confession in the special role of God the Father as source and cause of the Trinity. For the past year in the capital, he has labored arduously for the full divinity of the Son and the Spirit and their coequality with the Father, against a broad array of opponents. And yet, perhaps surprising to the modern interpreter, Gregory defines the faith in the biblical and traditional pattern of referring to the Father as “God” in the primary sense, just as the creed of Nicea had done. Following the New Testament witness, God is first and foremost the Father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; yet by virtue of their timeless generation from the Father, the Son and the Spirit fully share the Father’s divine nature and are therefore also God.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Gregory initially characterizes the three persons chiefly by their point of origin and their resulting relationships to one another: the one God is the unbegotten Father of Jesus Christ; the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who is begotten from the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.<sup>44</sup> Yet in addition to this brief set of terms, and before he has even finished the opening creedal statement, Gregory makes a point to specify the causal relationships that derive from God the Father. With respect to creation (“when mentioned separately”), the Son is also “God,” because he fully possesses the divine nature that he receives from the Father; but in the eternal relations among the three persons of the Trinity (“named together with the Father”), the Father is “God” in the primary sense, and the Son is “Lord,” on account of the monarchy of God the Father (again, as they are typically proclaimed in the New Testament).<sup>45</sup> As Gregory elaborates, it is the special property of the Father to be the cause and source of himself (as self-existent Divinity, being unbegotten, uncaused, and without source), of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—and thus the cause and source of the Trinity as a whole. To deny the Father’s character as source of the Trinity—either by positing a source other than the Father or by conceiving of the Son or the Spirit other than as deriving their existence from the Father as their cause—is for Gregory equivalent to denying the existence of God altogether.

The monarchy of God the Father—his unique identity as the “only source” and “sole principle” of the Trinity—figures prominently in each of Gregory’s

<sup>41</sup> Gregory holds the ancient view that the sun emits light instantaneously, taking no time.

<sup>42</sup> *Or.* 25.15.

<sup>43</sup> I use the term “generation” to refer both to the begetting of the Son and the sending forth of the Spirit by God the Father. When I mean to distinguish them, I will speak of the “begetting” of the Son and the “sending forth” or “procession” of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory again employs a creedal format, with the same emphasis on the priority of the Father and the relations of origin, in the doctrinal statement at *Or.* 39.12.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 1:2; 13:13; Gal 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:3. In the Gospels, the Johannine epistles, and Hebrews, “Son” takes the place of “Lord” in the other books.

major doctrinal statements<sup>46</sup> and proves to be the most fundamental element of his theological system. His first published discussion of the Trinity, in the set of three orations that he delivered as a newly ordained priest at Easter 362, focuses on this very theme.<sup>47</sup> Taking up the conventional definition of Nicene orthodoxy as being opposed to both Arianism and Sabellianism, Gregory argues that what distinguishes the true faith from both of these errors is the monarchy of the Father. On account of the Father's rank as source of the Son and Spirit (τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀξίωμα), he writes, the Son cannot be understood as a creature, as the Arians argue (who are "overly devoted" to the Father), nor can all three be simply different manifestations of only one person, as the Sabellians allege (who are "overly devoted" to the Son).<sup>48</sup> Years later, in his first oration in Constantinople, Gregory quotes and elaborates on this early statement.<sup>49</sup> Here he explains further that the monarchy and primary causality of the Father is the root of both the oneness of God (εἷς μὲν θεός) and the fact that there are three unique hypostases or persons (αἱ δὲ τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις).<sup>50</sup>

Because the Father fully conveys his Divinity to the Son and the Spirit as he generates them, all three persons possess the same divine nature and are therefore one God. Hence, there is one God because the Son and the Spirit refer back to the Father as a single cause (εἷς ἔν αὐτίον) and the origin of everything that they are and do.<sup>51</sup> When the Scriptures speak of the Son and the Spirit as possessing divine qualities or being generated or sent by the Father, they are referring ultimately to the Son's and the Spirit's source in the Father. For example, Jesus' statement

<sup>46</sup> As well as in each of the shorter passages, with the exception of *Or.* 6, where it is assumed although not discussed.

<sup>47</sup> *Or.* 2.36–38. Preceded only by a brief, formulaic statement in *Oration* 1 in the same series, which warns the congregation in Nazianzus not to be led astray from "the sound faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one Divinity and Power" (*Or.* 1.7). Whether *Or.* 2.38 is original or was added when Gregory expanded the oration during his retirement, its literary position at the beginning of his ordained ministry is significant.

<sup>48</sup> While Gregory regularly employs the conventional pro-Nicene opposition to Arians and Sabellians (*Or.* 2.36–37; 20.5; 21.13, 35; 33.16; 34.8; 30.6; 31.9, 30; 37.22; 39.11; 42.16), these statements function less as expressions of primary doctrinal content (as if Christian truth were essentially a mean between two extremes!) than as catch phrases and political slogans to signal his alignment with the broader pro-Nicene movement. This restricted meaning can be seen in the fact that Gregory rarely calls the Eunomians "Arians"—in the *Theological Orations*, for example, *Or.* 31.30 is an oblique reference, and *Or.* 30.6 and 18 refer only to imaginary Sabellians—and in his infrequent use of the terms in his panegyric on Athanasius, where he narrates the history of the fourth-century controversies (*Or.* 21.13, 25), and in *Oration* 33, whose traditional title is *Against the Arians and On Himself* (*Or.* 33.16).

<sup>49</sup> *Or.* 20.6–7. Again, whether he made this borrowing in real time or inserted it later when he edited his orations, the literary effect is the same.

<sup>50</sup> And in the previous section, τὸν ἕνα θεὸν τηρεῖν καὶ τὰς τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις ὁμολογεῖν, εἴτ' οὖν τρία πρόσωπα, καὶ ἐκάστην μετὰ τῆς ιδιότητος (*Or.* 20.6). Gregory's addition of the phrase εἴτ' οὖν τρία πρόσωπα to the original quotation from *Or.* 2.38 is one of several indications that he is not wedded to the particular terminology of ὑπόστασις, which is sometimes imagined to be a fixed Cappadocian term.

<sup>51</sup> *Or.* 20.7. See also *Or.* 41.9; 29.3; 30.16; 31.14, 30; 38.15 (= 45.27); 42.15.

that the Father is greater than he is (John 14:28) refers not to the Son's economic inferiority as the incarnate Lord, as Augustine preferred to interpret it,<sup>52</sup> but to the Father's superiority to the Son as the eternal source of his existence. Jesus' statement is therefore a direct, theological claim about the life of God.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Gregory writes, "Everything that pertains to the Spirit refers back to the first cause [the Father], just as everything that pertains to the Son"—such as the titles Life, Light, Goodness, and Lord.<sup>54</sup> As an expression of the unifying effect of the monarchy, Gregory famously states that the unity of the Trinity simply *is* the Father, "from whom the issue [the Son and the Spirit] come and to whom they are referred."<sup>55</sup> As the basis of the divine unity, the monarchy of the Father thus serves as Gregory's most frequent reply to the charge of tritheism.<sup>56</sup>

Conversely, Gregory continues, the monarchy of the Father is the root of the trinitarian distinctions as well.<sup>57</sup> The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are preserved as three unique entities because the Father is permanently "the Source who is without source—Source in the sense of cause, fount, and eternal light,"<sup>58</sup> and the Son (and the Spirit) are not uncaused or without source.<sup>59</sup> Because the Father eternally generates the Son and sends forth the Spirit as begotten and proceeding Divinity, they are distinct from the Father and from each other by virtue of their eternal origins in the Father. Hence, Gregory makes the well-known definition that the three persons are "relations" (σχέσεις) or "modes of existence" toward one another (τὸ πῶς ἔχειν πρὸς [ἄλληλα]).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>52</sup> E.g., *De Trinitate* 1.15, 18; 6.10. Although Gregory includes the phrases "my God and your God" and "greater" (John 20.17; 14.28) in the list of lowly, economic references to the Son in *Or.* 29.18, in this later passage he indicates his preference for the monarchian interpretation: "to say that the Father is greater than the Son considered as a human being is true, but trivial" (*Or.* 30.7).

<sup>53</sup> *Or.* 30.7. This reference to the Father's superiority as source is the main burden of the exegetical argumentation of the fourth *Theological Oration* (*Or.* 30.2–16).

<sup>54</sup> *Or.* 41.9. Gregory makes the same point, with specific reference to lowly expressions of the Spirit, at *Or.* 31.30. For the term "first cause," see also *Or.* 31.14, 16, 30; 37.5.

<sup>55</sup> *Or.* 42.15.

<sup>56</sup> See *Or.* 20.6; 23.6–7; 31.30; 25.16, 18; 38.8, 15; 40.41; 42.15.

<sup>57</sup> For polemical reasons Gregory finds himself needing to defend the divine unity and coequality against Eunomians, Pneumatomachians, and Homoians of various sorts more often than the permanent distinctions between the three persons, on which all parties were agreed. Yet he makes the point nevertheless, often against imaginary modalists.

<sup>58</sup> καὶ ἀνάρχου καὶ ἀρχῆς ἐπινοουμένου καὶ λεγομένου (ἀρχῆς δέ, ὡς αἰτίου καὶ ὡς πηγῆς καὶ ὡς αἰδίου φωτός).

<sup>59</sup> *Or.* 20.7.

<sup>60</sup> *Or.* 29.16. See also *Or.* 31.9: ἡ πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσις. For Gregory, what distinguishes the Spirit from the Son is their distinct modes of generation from the Father (procession versus begetting) (*Or.* 31.8–9), in contrast with the Augustinian tradition, which locates the difference in the Spirit's dual procession from the Father and the Son (see Augustine, *Sermones*. 71.20.33; *In Evangelium Johannis tractatus* 99.8–9; *Trin.* 4.29; 15.29, 47–48.) It may be a provocative suggestion in light of the *filioque* controversy, but there is an interesting comparison to be made between the Augustinian scheme and the arguments of the Eunomians and Pneumatomachians, as Gregory presents them. While Augustine emphatically asserts the unity and consubstantiality of the Trinity against both



In a famous, if often misunderstood, passage Gregory seeks to give expression to the dynamic life of the Trinity, which constantly arises from and returns to God the Father. Near the beginning of the third *Theological Oration* he writes that, contrary to the anarchy and polyarchy of the Greeks, which tend toward chaos and disorder, Christians recognize a monarchy in which a generative monad (the Father) eternally produces the Son and Spirit, thus transcending duality and making a triad. Here again, what makes for the unity of this eternal dynamic is that the distinct issue (the Son and the Spirit) “converge” on their source in unity, bringing about a union of divine nature, will, and action among all three.<sup>61</sup>

Gregory’s doctrinal commitment to the monarchy of the Father can be seen in the fact that, even as a pro-Nicene bishop, he continues to argue in fairly strong terms that the Father is “greater” than the Son and the Spirit as their cause and source. In his oration *On Baptism* from Epiphany 381, in which he gives a summary of the faith to a group of recently Homoian catechumens, Gregory goes so far as to say that he would rather simply call the Father “greater,” on account of his role as the source of both the equality and the divine being of the Son and Spirit, except that his detractors wrongly assume that a divine cause produces inferiors rather than equals.<sup>62</sup> For this reason Gregory is forced several times to explain that just because the Father is greater than the Son as cause does not mean that he is greater in being.<sup>63</sup> In making this qualification Gregory does not mean to weaken or cancel the priority of the Father, but on the contrary to clarify it as the foundation of the unity, the distinctions, and indeed the very Being of the Trinity.

The consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father and the divine unity, as well as the distinct identities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are therefore the eternal *result* of the Father’s divine generation. The monarchy of the Father is the foundational principle of trinitarian logic and the fundamental dynamic that contains and gives meaning to the grammatical aspects of consubstantial unity and relational distinctness. In this sense the Nicene term ὁμοούσιος functions mainly as a cipher for the more fundamental concept of the monarchy.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, in his discussion of the divine names at the end of the fourth *Theological Oration*, Gregory comments that Christ is called the “Son” to indicate both that he is identical with the Father in essence (τὰ πᾶν κατ’ οὐσίαν) and that he derives from him (καὶ κεῖθεν).<sup>65</sup>

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groups, he appears to share their assumption that the difference between begetting and procession does not suffice to prevent the Spirit from being a second Son, which is the main point Gregory is addressing in *Or.* 31.7–9.

<sup>61</sup> *Or.* 29.2. A similar reflection occurs in *Or.* 23.8.

<sup>62</sup> *Or.* 40.43.

<sup>63</sup> See also *Or.* 29.15 and 30.7.

<sup>64</sup> It is therefore understandable that Gregory uses the term so seldom and mainly to align himself publicly with the pro-Nicene movement for which it has become a watchword; or else to answer opposition to the term (see, e.g., *Or.* 31.10, with reference to the Holy Spirit).

<sup>65</sup> *Or.* 30.20.

With Gregory's doctrine now in view, we can return to those passages that locate the divine causality somewhere other than in God the Father. In speaking of God, the Divinity, or even the Son and the Holy Spirit as cause or source, Gregory is referring not to causal relations within the Trinity, but to divine causality toward creation. In the eternal life of God, the Father remains the sole cause and source; yet as a result of the monarchy of the Father (and certainly not in conflict with it) the Trinity or God or the Divinity in general, and the Son and the Spirit in particular, are also the cause and source of other things.<sup>66</sup> In this sense Gregory calls the Son "the Source from the Source";<sup>67</sup> or, expressing both internal and external causality together, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "Cause, Creator, and Perfecter".<sup>68</sup> Finally, Gregory's statements that God or the Divinity has no cause serve to indicate that God is not caused by anything else and has no cause outside himself but is rather the cause of all things.<sup>69</sup>

In light of this exposition, we can, finally, suggest a more accurate translation of *Oration* 31.14:

We have one God because there is a single Divinity and the things that issue from one [cause] refer back to it, even if three things are believed in.<sup>70</sup> For one is not more and another less God (θεός); nor is one before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power; nor are there any of the properties of divisible things, even if it is possible to perceive them. But, if we have to put it succinctly, the Divinity is undivided among things that are divided, as if among three suns that are related to one another there were a single co-mingling of their light. So when we look at the Divinity and the First Cause and the monarchy, what appears to us is one thing; but when we look at the things in which the Divinity exists, and the things that exist from the First Cause timelessly and with equal glory, there are three things that are worshipped.

The word order of the first sentence may seem to suggest that the phrase καὶ πρὸς ἓν refers to the Divinity, and consequently that τὰ ἐξ αὐτοῦ refers to all three persons, so that Gregory is saying that the unity of God is preserved if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all understood as deriving from a single cause, which is the divine essence. However, Gregory's consistent doctrine of the monarchy of the Father

<sup>66</sup> *Or.* 4.21; 20.7; 28.6, 13, 29, 31; 42.17; *Carm.* 1.1.6.4; 1.1.31.7.

<sup>67</sup> *Or.* 38.13 = *Or.* 45.9. In an interesting variation, Gregory also refers to the Father, Son, and Spirit as "Without source, Source, and That which is with the Source" (ἀναρχον καὶ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μετὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς, *Or.* 42.15). On the Spirit's role as source and cause of creation, see *Or.* 41.9; 31.29.

<sup>68</sup> *Or.* 34.8. αἴτιος καὶ δημιουργὸς καὶ τελειωποιός. Related is Gregory's argument that, while the Son is not without source with respect to the Father in eternity, nevertheless, as the maker of time, he is without source with respect to time (*Or.* 20.7; 39.12).

<sup>69</sup> *Or.* 23.7; 28.9; 29.19; 30.2, 11; 31.23; 38.3, 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Or.* 31.14. The Son and the Spirit refer back to the Father from whom they come. ἡμῖν εἰς θεός, ὅτι μία θεότης καὶ πρὸς ἓν [αἴτιον] τὰ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει, κἀν τρία πιστεύεται.

and parallel expressions in other texts make this reading unlikely. This sentence is effectively a paraphrase of the first sentence of *Oration* 20.7, where Gregory first discusses the monarchy of the Father at any length: “There is one God because the Son and the Spirit are referred back to a single cause.”<sup>71</sup> As Gregory explains in the same passage, God the Father is the source and cause that preserves the divine unity.<sup>72</sup> Yet because the monarchy of the Father causes all three persons to share the divine nature, one can also speak of the divine unity in this derivative sense, in terms of the single Divinity. At the beginning and the end of *Oration* 31.14 Gregory is making both points, as he often does; though here he mentions the result of the monarchy (the single, shared Divinity) before the monarchy itself, which has led to some confusion among interpreters.<sup>73</sup> In this passage Gregory is therefore referring not to the Divinity, but to the Father, as the cause of the Trinity, which is the point on which he ends (the First Cause and the monarchy). It will be obvious by now that this is neither the clearest nor the most important passage for establishing Gregory’s doctrine of divine causality, but merely one that has needed to be interpreted in concert with other, clearer texts since at least the seventh century.<sup>74</sup>

## ■ Gregory and Current Scholarship

It remains now to give an assessment of recent scholarship and to offer some summary reflections on the significance of Gregory’s doctrine of divine causality. The first and most obvious point is that, for Gregory, the cause of the Trinity is God the Father, not the divine essence in general, as Hanson, Torrance, Ayres, and to some extent Cross,<sup>75</sup> have argued. We can also observe that the most consistently bedeviling texts are *Orations* 29.2 and 31.14. In each case, this view of divine causality is indicative of other problems in the interpretation of Gregory’s work. For Ayres, the substitution of the divine essence for the monarchy of the Father, by which a generic sort of “three-in-oneness” is seen to express what it means to be God, manages to align Gregory with the essential pro-Nicene principles that Ayres has identified, but at the expense of many of Gregory’s deeper concerns.<sup>76</sup> (I will comment further on Hanson and Cross below.)

<sup>71</sup> *Or.* 20.7. εἷς μὲν θεός, εἰς ἓν αἴτιον καὶ Πνεύματος ἀναφερομένων.

<sup>72</sup> See also *Or.* 42.15.

<sup>73</sup> I.e., Gregory mentions that all three persons share “a single Divinity” (at the beginning of the passage), or simply “the Divinity” (at the end), before referring explicitly to the Father’s generation of the Son and the Spirit, or his prime causality and monarchy, which is the cause of the shared Divinity.

<sup>74</sup> Pseudo-Cyril reads *Or.* 31.14 together with *Or.* 20.7 and 42.15 (Egan, “Primal Cause,” 26–27 and nn. 26, 35). Incidentally, the Chalcedonian Pseudo-Cyril is one of the first to consider Gregory’s doctrine of the monarchy of the Father inconsistent with what he thinks is an adequate trinitarian perichoresis. It was to become a venerable tradition.

<sup>75</sup> With regard to the monarchy and divine causality in *Or.* 29.2 and 31.14.

<sup>76</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 245. Ayres also denies that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as relations are modes of existence toward one another; he regards Gregory’s proto-perichoretic conception of the

Yet the main response is to point out that Gregory's doctrine of divine causality is not at all illogical or arbitrary, as Meijering claims (followed by Norris, Egan, and Hanson), but represents the very heart of what he takes to be the catholic faith. Moreover, in the case of Meijering and Torrance, it is inherently suspicious, to say the least, to argue that (a) causeless ontological equality, as supposedly taught by Athanasius, constitutes the only viable orthodoxy; (b) any doctrine other than causeless ontological equality is an unfortunate vestige of Plotinus or Origen; and therefore (c) Gregory's doctrine is illogical and dogmatically insufficient. The irony in these assumptions is that they rule out of court what is arguably the very essence of Nicene orthodoxy. Moreover, this approach represents a pervasive tendency in modern patristic analysis and systematic theology to assume, quite apart from the textual evidence, that the unique causality and monarchy of the Father is a priori contradictory with the unity, co-equality, and shared Divinity of the Trinity. To cite a prominent example, it is precisely this interdependence between the Father's causality and the equality of the three persons that Wolfhart Pannenberg criticizes in the Cappadocians. In Pannenberg's view, the priority of the Father threatens the equality of the three persons and fails to distinguish the Father from the divine substance. Thus the Cappadocians represent a relapse to an older subordinationism and fail to answer the Eunomian charge of tritheism.<sup>77</sup> Among Western theological students (let alone professional theologians), it needs reiterating that Gregory's theological work takes place within a doctrinal and devotional context that depends entirely on the priority of God the Father; on this general point (irrespective of how they understand it) Gregory and the Eunomians were in complete agreement.<sup>78</sup> The fact that the heroically pro-Nicene Gregory does not go to great lengths to avoid suggesting that the Father is in any way superior to the Son and the Spirit should give us pause as modern interpreters.

To set the record straight, Gregory's doctrine of divine causality *entails* the affirmation that causality and consubstantiality, just as much as causality and personal distinctions within the Trinity necessarily belong together in one and the same theological principle. For Gregory, as for any Nicene theologian, there is no unity and equality in the Trinity—and there is no Trinity—if the Father does not

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Trinity as involving a dynamic movement toward unity in general, rather than the movement of the Spirit and the Son toward the Father (246–47); and he consequently overlooks Gregory's central perception of the revelation of the Trinity in the divine economy (on which more below). For a fuller assessment of Ayres's book—including its many strengths—see my forthcoming review in the *Journal of Religion*.

<sup>77</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991) 1:279–80 and n. 70, 322–23, 385. Pannenberg follows the earlier judgment of Karl Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1904) 146–48, 174.

<sup>78</sup> Together with other Homoians and the Pneumatomachians. Michel Barnes similarly observes that Eunomius and Gregory of Nyssa both assume that some form of divine causality is required, “Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality,” *Vigiliae christianae* 52 (1998) 59–87, at 62.

convey his Divinity to the Son and the Spirit by generating them; and there is no sense of causality and ordered hierarchy in the Trinity except the one by which the Father produces the Son and the Spirit as full partakers in his Divinity and thus ontological equals. Gregory would firmly reject the suggestion that the Father set the Trinity in motion (as if previously), and now that it is up and running, the ordered structure of the relations of origin somehow fades into the background, leaving a purely reciprocal, “perichoretic” exchange of Divinity. Even though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continually pour out and return the divine being, it is always, in an eternally prior sense, the *Father’s* divine being that they share.

It is here that we can see the difficulty with Cross’s interpretation of *Oration* 31.14. While Gregory is indeed answering Eunomian objections concerning the divisibility of the divine essence (as well as accusations of tritheism), he does not do so on the basis of the causal priority of the divine essence as a whole. In fact, such a reply would necessarily fall short, since the Eunomians are objecting not to the divisibility of a common divine nature per se, in the sense of a generic class to which three members belong, but rather to the idea that the Son *who is begotten from the Father* can receive the Father’s divine being (the only divine being) without dividing it. In other words, like Hanson, Pannenberg, and others, the Eunomians object to the possibility of divine relations being *both* causally ordered *and* equal at the same time. Gregory’s response is therefore to argue not for the unity or consubstantiality of three things in general—as if unity-in-diversity per se were the problem—but in defense of the intrinsic connection between causality and ontological equality in God.<sup>79</sup>

From a different quarter, Meyendorff is of course right to identify the Father as cause and source, as far as it goes. However, he understands the Father’s priority to mean that the ὑπόστασις of the Father is the source of the divine nature, so that Gregory exemplifies the Eastern, “personalist” view of the Trinity, which is superior to the Western, “essentialist” view. This dichotomy between Greek, patristic personalism and Latin, scholastic essentialism in trinitarian doctrine, which was set in motion in the seventeenth century by Denys Petau, recycled for twentieth-century consumption by Théodore de Régnon, and subsequently developed into a caricature of “Greek” and “Latin” approaches to the Trinity, fails to do justice to Gregory’s doctrine, to say the least.<sup>80</sup> For Gregory, God the Father is not some sort of divine person who exists primary to or independent of the divine nature; rather, he *is* the divine nature in its unbegotten mode of existence, or “unbegotten Divinity,” as I

<sup>79</sup> So *Or.* 30.7: “Being derived from such a cause [as the Father] does not mean being less than the uncaused.”

<sup>80</sup> As the fine study of André de Halleux has argued: “Personalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens? Une mauvaise controverse,” *RTL* 17 (1986) 129–55, 265–92; see 149–50 on Gregory in particular. De Régnon comments on Gregory in *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (3 vols.; Paris: Victor Retaux et Fils, 1892) 1:405. On the rather strange development of de Régnon’s theory in the twentieth century, see Michel Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995) 51–79, and Kristin Hennessy’s contribution in this *HTR* issue.

have suggested. Hence, the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, and thus of the divine nature that is in them,<sup>81</sup> but not of the divine nature per se, except in the sense that the Father is cause of himself in virtue of his self-existence, which is not what Meyendorff means.

At the heart of the matter for Gregory — and, I would argue, for Nicene theology in general — is the way in which the monarchy of the Father represents the structure and meaning of the divine economy (from which the idea derives). The nature of divine causality, as I have sought to show in Gregory's work, bears directly on the identity and saving work of Christ and is implicated in the very possibility of the knowledge of God. Hanson's account illustrates this principle in reverse, by the way in which his location of the causality in the divine essence correlates with his view that Gregory practices double-subject christological predication.<sup>82</sup> For in the same breath that he levels out the Trinity, depriving the Son of his eternal definition by the Father, Hanson also removes the Son's presence in Jesus Christ as a single subject of existence to save and to reveal the knowledge of God. Yet for Gregory the priority of God the Father as the real, eternal ordering of the divine life represents both the structure of the divine economy and the theological meaning of Christian existence,<sup>83</sup> which is to know the divine light of the Father made manifest in the luminous Son by the light of the equally brilliant Spirit.<sup>84</sup> The extent to which this aspect of Gregory's doctrine has not been recognized among contemporary theologians is probably an indication of a more general unease with the Nicene faith itself.

<sup>81</sup> See *Or.* 42.15.

<sup>82</sup> Hanson, *Search*, 713. These two points do not necessarily go together, of course; but the fact that they are so closely related in Gregory's thought makes Hanson's denial of both rather telling.

<sup>83</sup> Observed also by McGuckin, "Perceiving Light," 29. See now ch. 4 of my *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity*.

<sup>84</sup> *Or.* 31.3.

# *Quid tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *De Trinitate* 5 and 7

Richard Cross  
*Oriel College, Oxford*

It is generally held by systematic theologians that Augustine more or less radically shifts the understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity found in his Greek sources, and that, at least in part, this shift is a consequence of his failure fully to understand these sources. His own testimony of puzzlement provides some strong *prima facie* evidence in favor of such readings. Colin Gunton comments as follows, both on Augustine's apparent agnosticism and on his consequent misunderstanding of the Greek achievement:

It is difficult for [Augustine] to understand the meaning of the Greek *hypostasis*. One reason is that he can make nothing of the distinction so central to Cappadocian ontology between *ousia* and *hypostasis*: "I do not know what distinction they wish to make" (V.10). Certainly, it is unfair to say that he gets nothing of the point at all, for he goes on to say that, in view of the difficulty of translating the Greek terms into Latin, he prefers to say, with his Latin tradition, *unam essentiam* or *substantiam* and *tres personas*. Augustine at least realizes that different concepts are required if we are to express the distinction between the way in which God is one and the way in which he is three. It becomes clear, however, that the adoption of the correct Latin equivalents does not enable him to get the point, for, in a famous statement, he admits that he does not really see why the term should be used. '*Dictum est tamen tres personae non ut illud diceretur sed ne taceretur*' (V.10, cf. VII.7: "this formula was decided upon, in order that we might be able to give some kind of answer when we were asked, what are the three"). . . . Moreover, Augustine reveals that he is unaware of what is going on when

he makes it appear to be merely a matter of linguistic usage (*forte secundum linguae suae consuetudinem*, VII.11).<sup>1</sup>

In this short piece, I want to ask more precisely what it is that Augustine professes not to understand. Answering this question involves some close textual reading of a somewhat dense kind, reading which is fundamentally *logical* in nature (as Augustine's text is at the moment when it raises the sort of question Gunton highlights). But the answer is important, since readings such as that offered by Colin Gunton have *ecumenical* consequences—that the Western tradition, thanks to Augustine's failures, fundamentally misunderstands genuine (i.e., Greek) trinitarian theology. Taking steps towards showing the contrary would thus be a matter of great ecclesiastical moment.<sup>2</sup> To try to see what Augustine professes not to understand, we shall have to clarify what precisely Augustine attempts to teach in the relevant parts of books 5 and (especially) 7 of *De Trinitate* [hereafter, *Trin.*]. In passing, I hope to provide some preliminary assessment of the wider issue of whether in fact Augustine misunderstood the distinction or distinctions between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις that can reasonably be thought to have been proposed by the Greek theologians of the late fourth century. But the judgment will be provisional, in the sense that I do not have the space here even to begin an adequate treatment of the fourth-century Greek trinitarian tradition or traditions.

## ■ What Augustine Professes Not to Understand

In *Trin.* 5.8.9 Augustine sets up a problem that he leaves unresolved until the middle of book 7. The problem has to do with divine simplicity and its relation to the use of the term “person” in God.<sup>3</sup> According to the doctrine of divine simplicity,

<sup>1</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 39–40.

<sup>2</sup> Literature rebutting alleged divergences between Eastern and Western views of the Trinity is becoming increasingly widespread: see for example the various different approaches to the topic in Rowan Williams, “*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*,” *Collectanea Augustiniana. Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* (ed. B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houlin; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990) 317–22; Michel René Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995) 51–79; Richard Cross, “Two Models of the Trinity?” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002) 275–94; David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (ed. Sarah Coakley; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003) 111–31 (many of the essays in Coakley's valuable collection can be read profitably in this context); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) chs. 14 and 15. The best refutation of the fundamental historiographical paradigm upon which the older analyses tended to rely is André de Halleux, “Personalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les pères cappadociens,” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 17 (1986) 129–55, 265–92. As far as I know, none of this literature includes a careful *logical* reading of the relevant portions of *Trin.* of the kind that I attempt here.

<sup>3</sup> I owe my understanding of the nature of the problem in book 5 of *Trin.* entirely to Joseph Jedwab—particularly the insight that “person” is not a relational term. He disagrees strongly with my account of Augustine's solution to the problem, which I outline in section 3 below.



Let us hold this above all, that whatever is said of that most eminent and divine greatness is said substantially. But whatever [is said] “to another” (*ad aliquid*) is said not substantially but relationally. “Of the same substance” is of such force in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that whatever in the highest nature is said of each with respect to themselves is said not plurally but singly. For just as the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, which no one doubts is said according to substance, nevertheless we do not say that the most excellent Trinity is three gods but one God.<sup>4</sup>

Through the rest of 5.8.9, Augustine goes on to apply this rule to “great,” “good” and a range of other non-relational divine attributes. In 5.8.10, Augustine considers the Greek term ὑπόστασις. The concern, presumably, is that, like “God,” “great” and “good,” ὑπόστασις is not a relational term, and Augustine goes on to make the same point about “person”:

They indeed say *hypostasis*, but I do not know what they intend to be the difference between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, such that most of us who treat these things in the Greek language are accustomed to say “one *ousia*, three *hypostases*,” which is “one essence, three substances (*unam essentiam, tres substantias*)” in Latin. But because our customary [Latin] usage has already obtained, [namely] that when we say “essence” is understood what is understood when we say “substance,” we do not dare to say “one essence, three substances,” but “one essence or substance”. . . . When it is asked “what three (*quid tres*),” human language straightforwardly labors under great lack. “Three persons” is said, not that it might be said, but that it might not fail to be said.<sup>5</sup>

The proper names of Father, Son, and Spirit are said relationally.<sup>6</sup> But the term “person” does not seem to be like this. This seems to allow the inference from one God to one person. To avoid Sabellianism,<sup>7</sup> we have to say something; that that “something” is “person” is puzzling.

Later, in book 7, Augustine twice explicitly makes the point that God’s subsistence itself cannot be relational:

If it is one thing for God to be, and another for him to subsist, just as it is one thing for God to be, and another for him to be Father or Lord (for what he is is said non-relationally (*ad se*), whereas “Father” is said in relation to the Son and “Lord” to the creature which serves him), so that he subsists relationally just as he begets relationally and is Lord relationally—so now substance will not be substance, because it will be relational. For just as “essence” (*essentia*) is named from being (*esse*), so we say “substance” from what it is to subsist. But it is absurd that substance should be said relationally, for everything

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.8.9, 1–6 (ed. W. J. Mountain; 2 vols; Corpus Christianorum: Series latina 50, 50A; Turnhout: Brepols, 1968) 1:215.

<sup>5</sup> *Trin.* 5.8.10, 43–51; 5.9.10, 7–11 (1:216–17). From now on I use “essence” for the Latin term *essentia*, “substance” for *substantia*, and “person” for *persona*.

<sup>6</sup> *Trin.* 5.11.12 (1:218–20).

<sup>7</sup> *Trin.* 7.9.10, 7–8 (1:217).

subsists non-relationally. How much more does God—if indeed it is fitting that God should be said to subsist.<sup>8</sup>

This yields the conclusion that substance is non-relational—and since, as we shall see below, being a person entails subsisting, it seems that “person” should be a non-relational predicate. Later, Augustine makes a similar point:

Therefore, as the substance of the Father is the Father himself, not as he is Father, but as he is, so too the person of the Father is not other than the Father himself. For person is said non-relationally (*ad se*), not in relation to Son and Spirit, just as he is called “God,” “great,” “good,” “just” and all other such things. And just as it is the same thing for him to be as to be God, great, and good, so it is the same thing for him to be as to be person. Why therefore do we not call these three together “one person,” as “one essence” and “one God,” but say “three persons” even though we do not say “three gods” or “three essences,” unless it be because we want some one word to serve for this meaning by which we understand the Trinity, so that we would not be entirely silent when asked “what three,” when we confessed there to be three?<sup>9</sup>

Neither “substance” nor “person” can be relational terms, for we do not use them as parts of two-place predicates (unlike genuinely relational terms such as “father” or “friend”).<sup>10</sup>

Now, the gist of all this is that, if “person” is non-relational, then the “one God, therefore one person” or “one essence, therefore one person” inferences should be sound. What Augustine tries to provide in book 7 is a way of understanding the term “person” such that these inferences are not sound, despite the fact that “person” is non-relational. The same problem arises too for the Greek usage, in which “substance” (ὕποστασις) corresponds to “person,” and “essence” (οὐσία) to “substance”:

For what must be understood to be said of persons according to our usage must be understood to be said of substances according to the Greek usage. For in this way they say “three substances, one essence,” just as we say “three persons, one essence or substance.”<sup>11</sup>

As we shall see, Augustine is not too concerned about the second of these, because he is not strongly committed to thinking of God as a substance. But the first is troubling, for it would again seem to license the disallowed inferences.

Nevertheless, another agnostic statement, parallel to the end of the passage from book 5 quoted above, makes it clear that the distinction between essence and person is hard to understand in both Latin and Greek, since there is no easy answer to the

<sup>8</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.9, 11, 142–50 (1:260).

<sup>9</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 28–33 (1:262).

<sup>10</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 8–27 (1:261–62).

<sup>11</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.8, 112–16 (1:259).

question “what three.” Having noted the divergence in usage between Greeks and Latins, Augustine continues:

When it is asked “what ones the three are (*quid tria*)” or “what three (*quid tres*),” we apply ourselves to find out some generic or specific noun under which we can include the three, and nothing comes to mind, because the supereminence of the divinity exceeds the faculty of customary usage. For God is more truly thought of than spoken of, and more truly is than thought of.<sup>12</sup>

There is no obvious word to use in reply to the “what three” question, and it is thus perhaps a matter of indifference that the Greeks use “substance” (ὕπόστασις) whereas the Latins use “person” (*persona*).

What is the force of the hesitancy in these passages? We should certainly keep in mind a series of warnings Augustine repeats throughout the book to the effect that we are “speaking of things that cannot be uttered,”<sup>13</sup> and that his motivation for wanting to do so was merely the necessity of responding to heretical views of God<sup>14</sup>—and thus (in accordance with the apophatic statements just quoted) he is not saying something for the sake of saying it, but because it has to be said. But it seems to me that, having embarked on this course of action—speaking of the unutterable for the purpose of refuting Arians<sup>15</sup> and Sabellians<sup>16</sup>—Augustine’s rhetorical reserve masks a greater theological confidence, and I shall try to demonstrate this in the next section of my paper.

### ■ The Argument in *Trin.* 7.4.7–7.6.11

*Trin.* 7.4.7–7.6.11 forms a unit. The first three chapters of book 7 deal with the way in which all three divine persons are identified with the divine wisdom, and there is an obvious break between *Trin.* 7.6.11 and 7.6.12. *Trin.* 7.6.12—the last section of the book—deals with some of the issues raised in the earlier parts of the book, but in it Augustine adopts a less argumentative rhetorical voice and attempts to make his points not by reason but by scriptural exegesis. The portion of text I am concerned with focuses on a very particular problem, and Augustine deals with it using the tools not of biblical exegesis but of technical logic. Scripture is used rarely—indeed, never in support of the technical trinitarian aspects of the argument. The general problem Augustine addresses in this portion of *Trin.* is related to the one I described in the previous section. The term “essence” is common to all the divine persons and likewise common is the term “person.” This is a function of the fact that “person” is not a relational term (as we saw in the previous section). Why then, having asserted that there is one essence, can we not therefore assert

<sup>12</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 10–15 (1:255).

<sup>13</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 1–2 (1:255).

<sup>14</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 1–3 (1:259).

<sup>15</sup> *Trin.* 5.3.4, 1–5 (1:208).

<sup>16</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.9, 125–27 (1:259).

that there is also one person? Conversely, why, having asserted that there are three persons, can we not therefore assert that there are also three essences? Specifically, the question that arises at the very beginning of the section is about the legitimacy of talking about three *persons* at all (I quoted the relevant passage in the last section); Augustine's way into the pair of general questions is by close examination of this specific question. The context, it should be noted, is a return to the concerns first raised in book 5 about the linguistic divergences between Greek and Latin traditions. Despite the various agnostic protestations noted above, it seems to me that, by the end of book 7, Augustine has offered a reasonably clear answer to the questions raised. The effect of the argument is cumulative, and it relies on showing that the divine essence is common to the persons in a way in which divine personhood is not. This provides a principle on the basis of which Augustine can resist the disallowed inferences, even on the assumption that "person" is a non-relational term.

After noting the difficulty of the subject, and its fundamentally mysterious nature, Augustine begins his discussion of the legitimacy of the "three persons" formulation by considering the case of three human beings, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and observes that we can speak of these human beings in the plural "by a specific noun (*nomine speciali*)"—namely, "man"—or "by a generic noun (*nomine generali*)"—namely, "animal."<sup>17</sup> Augustine goes on to note that the plural use of a specific noun entails the plural use of a generic one—if there are three men, then there are three animals—whereas the plural use of a generic noun does not entail plural use of a specific noun—it is not the case that there being three animals requires there to be three of a given species of animal, since most arbitrarily chosen groups of three animals will include animals of different species.<sup>18</sup> This observation, clearly true, is also traditional; compare, for example, Porphyry, developing some insights from Aristotle's *Categories*:

Now given what each of genus and species is, and given that whereas the genus is one the species are several (for the division of a genus is always into several species), the genus is always predicated of the species, and all the higher things are predicated of those beneath them. But the species is predicated neither of the genus immediately above it nor of higher ones. For it does not go both ways.<sup>19</sup>

Up to this point, the discussion is simply about names, and Augustine studiously avoids making any metaphysical claims about real universals. But on the face of it he goes on to do so:

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have in common that which is man (*commune habent id quod est homo*), and for this reason are called three men; horse

<sup>17</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 16–22 (1:255).

<sup>18</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 37–45 (1:256).

<sup>19</sup> Porphyry, *Isagoge* (ed. Adolfus Busse; *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 4/1; Berlin: Reimer, 1887) 6, 24–7, 4; trans. Paul Vincent Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) 6 (par. 33).

and ox and dog have in common that which is animal, and for this reason are called three animals. So too we call three laurels three trees; laurel, myrtle and olive we merely call three trees or substances or natures. And so three stones three bodies; but stone, wood and iron we merely call three bodies or by any other generic noun by which they can be spoken of.<sup>20</sup>

A number of points call for comment. The philosophical background here is again something like the so-called “tree” of Porphyry from the *Isagoge* [*Isag.*]. (Whether or not Augustine was directly acquainted with the *Isag.* is unknown, but the Porphyrian patterns of argument to which he appeals were common enough in late antiquity.) Porphyry argues that each one of Aristotle’s categories can be divided from most general to most specific,<sup>21</sup> and the example he offers is the division of the genus of substance:

Substance itself is a genus. Man is the most specific and the one that is only a species. Body is a species of substance but a genus of animate body. Animate body is a species of body but a genus of animal. Again, animal is a species of animate body but a genus of rational animal. Rational animal is a species of animal but a genus of men. Now man is a species of rational animal, but no longer a genus—of particular man. Instead it is a species only. Everything prior to individuals and predicated immediately of them is a species only, no longer a genus.<sup>22</sup>

Each species is distinguished from others of the same genus by what is called a “specific difference:”

One thing is said to differ from another when it is distinguished by a specific difference. For example, man is distinguished from horse by a specific difference: the quality rational. . . . It is in accordance with the differences that make a thing other that there arise the divisions of genera into species, and that definitions are given, since definitions are made up of genus and such differences.<sup>23</sup>

Porphyry’s discussion concerns language, but it might also concern more than that: *real* genera and *real* species, shared extramental universals. And the same could be said of Augustine’s discussion. It clearly concerns language (and certainly does in the second half of the last Augustinian passage just quoted), but it might also concern more than that. The impression that it does is reinforced by the claim that three human beings “have in common that which is man,” and three animals “that which is animal.” Does Augustine here mean to suggest that there is an extramental object, a real universal, common to things in a species, and another one common to things in a genus? If so, then the specific universal would be one of the possible referents of the noun “man,” and the generic universal one of the possible referents

<sup>20</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 45–55 (1:256).

<sup>21</sup> *Isag.* 4, 15–20; Spade, *Five Texts*, 4 (par. 21).

<sup>22</sup> *Isag.* 4, 25–5, 1; Spade, *Five Texts*, 4 (par. 23).

<sup>23</sup> *Isag.* 8, 15–17—9, 2–4; Spade *Five Texts*, 7–8 (pars. 41–42).

of the noun “animal.” Whether or not this is what Augustine intends is not known to me, though his intentions in any case make no difference to the overall argument I am attempting to develop here. Supporting a more conceptualist or nominalist reading of Augustine on the issue of genera and species is the thought that (as we shall see) Augustine treats “person” as a generic noun, exactly parallel to “animal”; it is perhaps unlikely that he thought that this committed him to the position that one possible referent of the noun “person” is a real universal, one that in the case of God would be common to the three divine persons as a sort of second essence or nature over and above the divine essence that the three persons somehow share. If Augustine does take a nominalist line on the reality of genera and species, then he has a principled way of distinguishing the commonality of generic terms such as “person” from the real commonality of the divine essence. But in any case, however we construe the commonality of genera and species, Augustine thinks that there is a quite different way in which the divine essence is common to the persons. Briefly, as we shall see below, Augustine holds that genera and species are *divisible* into their particulars in a way that the common divine essence fails to be. The divine essence, in effect, is indivisible and common. Whenever I refer to “specific” or “generic commonality,” I shall presuppose that the kind of commonality highlighted is *divisible* commonality.

The argument thus far has been that, according to Augustine, the use of plural *count nouns* requires some kind of specific or generic commonality. The question that then arises is this:

Since therefore the Father, Son and Spirit are three, let us ask what three (*quid tres*) they are, what they have in common.<sup>24</sup>

The issue is what *kind* of things are persons, and this involves the identification of something that the persons have in common. Augustine makes some progress in this discussion, since he proposes some such features, and this gets him as far as seeing that “person” is a genus term. He does not know what the relevant species term is; it is for this reason, presumably, that he uses the term “person” reluctantly: it would be better if there were a term that could be used to express something *specific* common to the persons—it would be better, in other words, if there were a species term that we could use. Still, if the term is common, then it is either species or genus:

What three (*quid tres*)? For if *three persons*, then that which a person is is common to them (*commune est eis id quod persona est*). Therefore if we respect the custom of usage, this noun is specific or general to them.<sup>25</sup>

Augustine answers this by making some distinctions on the basis of his earlier use of the Porphyrian tree: namely, that three things of the same species (things that,

<sup>24</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 56–57 (1:256–57).

<sup>25</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 65–67 (1:257).

as Augustine puts it, lack “difference/diversity of nature”<sup>26</sup>) are *ipso facto* of the same genus and that three things of the same species ought to have both specific and generic names.<sup>27</sup> The three divine persons lack diversity of nature and, thus, should have a specific name. In fact, however, there is no such name. “Person” is a *generic* term, predicable of man and God:

Here indeed, where there is no diversity of essence, it is necessary that these three also have a specific name: which, however, is not found. For “person” is a generic noun, in as much as a human being can also be called this, although there is such a great distinction between man and God.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever its meaning, its categorial status is clear: “person” is a generic term since it applies across species, and Augustine leaves unsolved the *aporia* of the correct specific term for Father, Son, and Spirit. (This lack is perhaps not surprising: there could well be specific terms predicable of divine persons, but such terms will be irreducibly proper to the divine persons, and perhaps not knowable without revelation. And the Bible is notably silent on such technical matters.)

It is clear enough that Augustine believes himself to be able to provide some sort of account of the meaning of this generic word. As we shall see below, he denies that the meaning can include the concept of individuality. But, as Augustine makes clear a bit later on, in *Trin.* 7.5.10, it certainly includes the notion of *subsistence*:<sup>29</sup> failing to be in something as in a subject.<sup>30</sup> The notion of subsistence here is one, however, that Augustine is careful about, for paradigm cases of things that subsist are substances. “Substance” is said non-relationally. In this respect it is just like both “essence” and “person.” But the notion of substance implies being a subject of properties—“standing (*stans*) under (*sub*)” greatness, wisdom, omnipotence, goodness, and so on, in the case of God. God is therefore more properly talked of as essence, not substance, since he does not “stand under” his attributes, but is identical with them.<sup>31</sup> Equally, “three persons” is a better formulation than “three substances” for just the same reason.<sup>32</sup> Still, the notion of non-inherence (subsistence) does not entail that of “standing under” properties (substance); for this reason, persons can subsist while not being substances. Augustine’s concerns about the Greek usage, then, might focus on the thought that, if the divine persons are substances (as the Greeks suppose), then, counterfactually, they must stand under the divine properties. But he is clearly not too concerned about this fundamentally technical

<sup>26</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 67–68, 69, 73 (1:257).

<sup>27</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 67–72 (1:257).

<sup>28</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.7, 72–76 (1:257).

<sup>29</sup> *Trin.* 7.5.10, 24–26; 7.6.11, 1–8 (1:261).

<sup>30</sup> *Trin.* 7.5.10, 3–5 (1:260). I return to this important passage below, for Augustine does not want the relevant notion of subsistence to include being the subject of accidents.

<sup>31</sup> *Trin.* 7.5.10, 1–26 (1:260–61).

<sup>32</sup> *Trin.* 7.5.10, 1–2 (1:261). The critical edition includes this sentence as 7.6.10, linking it with the next section. In fact, the later division of the text at either of these points tends to obscure the evident continuity of the argument here.

clarification, acknowledging that different usage does not necessarily signal different metaphysical commitment.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps his complaint about the Greek distinction between substance and person, οὐσία and ὑπόστασις (“I do not know what they intend to be the difference”) relates either to the lack of any previous attempt known to him to define ὑπόστασις and to assign to it any appropriate categorial analysis, or to the Greek attempt, rejected by Augustine, to analyze ὑπόστασις in terms of individuality. Augustine does not say, and I do not know. (I return to this in section 3 below.) What is clear is that Augustine is puzzled by the fact that “person” is a generic term and that there is no specific term known to him to refer to Father, Son, and Spirit; this puzzle affects the Greek account as much as his own. Augustine is happy to talk about “three somethings (*tria quaedam*)” in this context; presumably “something (*quoddam*)” is a higher genus for “person.”<sup>34</sup>

With something like this account of the word “person” presupposed, *Trin.* 7.4.8 begins the attempt to answer the general question posed at the beginning of the unit of text under discussion here. If having something in common is sufficient for countability, then, since the divine essence is common, surely we should be able to treat “God” as a count noun too:

In relation to the generic term itself [viz. “person”], if we say “three persons” because that which a person is is common to them . . . why do we not also say “three gods”? For certainly, since the Father is a person, and the Son a person, and the Holy Spirit a person, there are for this reason three persons. Therefore since the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, why are there not three gods? Or since, on account of the ineffable conjunction, these three are together one God, why are they not also one person such that we could not say “three persons,” even though each singular one we call “a person,” just as we cannot say “three gods” even though we call each singular one “God,” whether the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit?<sup>35</sup>

The answer to this question is scriptural—namely, that “three gods” is contradicted by the Bible, whereas “three persons” is not.<sup>36</sup> This does not dispose of a closely related theological puzzle, however:

Why is it not therefore also lawful to say “three essences,” which likewise Scripture neither says nor contradicts? For if “essence” is a specific name common to the three, why are they not called “three essences” as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are called “three men” on the grounds that “man” is a specific noun common to all men? If however “essence” is not a specific noun but a generic one, since man, cattle, tree, constellation and angel are called “essence,” why are these not called “three essences” as three horses

<sup>33</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 2–8 (1:261).

<sup>34</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.9, 125 (1:259).

<sup>35</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.8, 77–78, 81–89 (1:257–58).

<sup>36</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.8, 90–97 (1:258).



are called “three animals” and three laurels “three trees” and three stones “three bodies”?<sup>37</sup>

If “essence” were a specific or generic noun, we would have to say “three essences,” just as we say “three persons,” on the assumption that “person” is a generic noun. Augustine will eventually draw the conclusion that the divine essence is common to the persons, but *not* in the divisible way that a genus or species is common to three individuals or particulars.

Now, that God is one essence, Augustine thinks, is easy enough to show. Since it is the same thing for God to be God as for him to be (*esse*), then if there is just one God there will just one essence (*essentia*, “be-ing”).<sup>38</sup> But this raises the question about “person,” since “person” is said non-relationally, and accepting one (non-relational) essence seems to run the risk of forcing an acceptance of one (non-relational) person too. The relevant passage is the third quoted in section 1 above. The reply is in two stages. First, the divine essence is neither the genus nor the species of the divine persons. (If it were, then “essence” would be a count noun, as are all specific and generic nouns according to Augustine.) Secondly, the divine essence is a numerically singular thing shared by the three divine persons (it is “common and the same” in all of them). And this justifies our saying “one essence,” and thus provides a basis for the biblical usage of “one God,” just as the generic status of the term “person” justifies the phrase “three persons.” What Augustine needs here is an account of the essence that distinguishes it from any genus or species. And this is precisely what he goes on to provide.

The first of these two stages considers in turn the possibility that the divine essence could be a genus and the persons species or individuals of it, and the possibility that the divine essence could be a species and the persons individuals of it. One result of this stage of the discussion is that the definition of “person” cannot include the concept of individuality: the persons are not individual instances of some genus or species.<sup>39</sup> The possibility that the divine essence could be a genus and the divine persons species of it is attributed by Augustine to “some (*nonnulli*)” theologians.<sup>40</sup> Augustine notes that, if this possibility is correct, then the Porphyrian rule of inference from many cases of a species to many cases of a genus does not

<sup>37</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.8, 97–106 (1:258).

<sup>38</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.9, 139–41 (1:259–60).

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Augustine never treats Father, Son, and Spirit as individuals of the genus *person*, but while it is easy to think of reasons why he would not want to treat of them in this way, he says nothing that is sufficient to prevent the conclusion that the persons are in fact individuals of this genus. After all, *person* is clearly a genus, and Augustine is happy enough with the claim that there are *three* persons — which looks like a claim that the persons are three individuals of the genus *person*. Nevertheless, it is clear enough from my discussion thus far that Boethius’s famous definition of “person” as “individual substance of rational nature” is markedly un-Augustinian. Boethius, *De persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3 (ed. C. Moreschini; Bibliotheca scriptorum graecorum et romanorum teubneriana; Munich: Suar, 2000) 214.

<sup>40</sup> On the Cappadocian view that the divine essence could be a genus or species, and the persons individuals, see section 3 below.

obtain, for there would be three persons (species) and yet just one essence (genus), contrary to the established laws of logic.<sup>41</sup> If the divine essence is a genus and the persons individuals, then two distinct logical rules are violated. First, in a manner analogous to the case just considered, the soundness of the inference from many individuals to many cases of a genus is broken (since there would be three individual persons and only one God, whereas in standard cases such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we can infer both three men and three animals, for example).<sup>42</sup> Secondly, we would be left with an anomalous case of a genus with no species (thus fracturing the pattern of division established in the Porphyrian tree).<sup>43</sup> The divine essence is therefore not a genus.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, the divine essence is not a species to which individuals belong. The reason is simple, and Augustine's discussion of it provides the key evidence for my assertion, made above, that the genera and species have some kind of commonality compatible with *divisibility*. A species is *divided* into its particulars—"subdivided," as Augustine puts it—as (for example) the species *man* is into many men.<sup>45</sup> But the divine essence is singular, and like any singular item is *indivisible* (just as an individual human being cannot be "subdivided into other singular men").<sup>46</sup> There is also clearly a sense in which different created individuals can be said to be the *same* essence. But this seems to be an informal sense of sameness—Augustine prefers the non-technical term "nature" in this context—that Augustine mentions merely to introduce his own preferred analogy, that of common *matter* (to which I return in a moment):

Do we say "three substances, one essence," or "three persons, one essence" just as we say that three men of the same sex, of the same bodily constitution, or of the same mind are one *nature* (for there are three men and one nature)? And this is in some way similar, for the ancients, who spoke Latin before they had these words (which came into use only recently)—namely, "essence" or "substance"—used "nature" to say them. Therefore it is not according to genus and species that we say these things, but according to the same common matter, as it were.<sup>47</sup>

The final sentence marks the conclusion of the argument about genus, species and individual that has occupied Augustine from the beginning of *Trin.* 7.4.7. The divine essence is neither a genus nor a species. The point of the preceding sentences is that "essence" need not be understood in any technical way, as implying *genus* or *species*; it could be equivalent to "nature," and this latter term (presumably)

<sup>41</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 33–41 (1:262–63).

<sup>42</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 41–51 (1:263).

<sup>43</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 53–55 (1:263).

<sup>44</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 55–56 (1:263).

<sup>45</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 56–60 (1:263).

<sup>46</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 60–65 (1:263).

<sup>47</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 65–76 (1:263–64), my italics.

can be used to pick out not merely the divisible commonality of genus or species, but also some kind of indivisible commonality: the commonality of something identical in the things that share it. And this indivisible commonality explains why the “three essences” usage is illegitimate—the second stage of Augustine’s explanation of the unsoundness of the inference “three persons, therefore three essences/three Gods.”

The example of such commonality that Augustine develops and, with strong qualifications and reservations, accepts is that of *matter*:

We do not therefore say these things according to genus and species, but as it were according to the same and common matter.<sup>48</sup>

The analogy is not all that helpful, though it certainly has the advantage of appearing in Augustine’s predecessors—most notably in this context Basil of Caesarea.<sup>49</sup> But the key thing about it, as far as I can see, is that matter is (in some sense) the *same* in all the things that are made of it:

Just as, if three statutes are made from the same gold we should say “three statues, one gold,” we should not say that the gold is a species and the statues individuals.<sup>50</sup>

The great benefit of the analogy, as Augustine sees it, is that “gold” is a *mass noun*, not a count noun, and there is thus no valid inference from “three statues” to “three golds,” as it were. And the illegitimacy of such an inference obtains in the case of the divine essence too: we cannot argue from three divine persons to three divine essences. In neither case, that of gold or of the divine essence, are we talking about a genus or species. The disadvantage of the analogy, according to Augustine, is that there are things other than statues that are made of gold (whereas only men fall under the definition of “man”). Both points, positive and negative, are made in the following passage:

Therefore, although in the three statues we should rightly say “three statues, one gold,” we do not however speak such that we understand gold to be a genus and the statues species. Neither do we call the Trinity “three persons or substances, one essence and one God” in this way, as though the three subsisted from one matter, even if whatever that is is unfolded in the three: for there is nothing else of its essence other than this Trinity.<sup>51</sup>

I take it that the denial made in the second sentence here is not that the analogy to matter is unsound *tout court*; we should not see Augustine here as rejecting the model, merely as providing strong restrictions on its applicability.

The remainder of the section, up to the end of *Trin.* 7.6.11, makes some concluding clarifications, for the most part further circumscribing the applicability

<sup>48</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 74–76 (1:264).

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Basil, *Contra Eunomium* 2.4 (PG, XXIX, 577C).

<sup>50</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 76–79 (1:264).

<sup>51</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 90–97 (1:264).

of the analogy to gold. “Gold” is a mass noun, and as such admits of quantitative variations such as “more” or “less”; “essence,” however, is not actually a mass noun, despite its similarities to such nouns in other respects as just outlined. One divine person is no more of the divine essence than three are—the essence, it seems, is fully in, and coordinatively common to, each divine person.<sup>52</sup> And we should not claim that the persons are “from” the essence in the way that statues are made “from” gold. The preposition “from” implies that there can be more things that remain to be produced, and there can be no more divine persons.<sup>53</sup> (Comparing “essence” to the looser and less technical “nature,” Augustine notes parenthetically that we can say “three human beings *from* one nature” since there can always be more human beings, again reinforcing his claim that “essence” predicated of the divine persons is not a species noun.<sup>54</sup>)

Augustine’s view, then, is that each divine person includes the common divine essence, and that each divine person is distinct from any other divine person by a relation. The essence cannot be a genus or species of the persons, since genera and species are both divided into their particulars. The divine essence is fully real (as evidenced by the analogy to matter), and yet undivided—identically the same singular thing in each divine person. About this, it seems, Augustine is not overly puzzled, though he knows that the best he can offer is a highly-qualified analogy from the material realm. As he puts it,

[The animal man] cannot think except of mass and space, whether small or great, as phantasms, like the images of bodies, fly around in his mind.<sup>55</sup>

Still, it seems that Augustine has answered his question about the way in which to prevent inferences of the “one God, one person” or “three persons, three gods” kind, and that this question no longer holds particular problems—even on the assumption (accepted by Augustine) that “person” is a non-relational term. There are created analogues to the one essence and three persons in God (e.g., one gold, three statues), and in any case the rejected inferences would obtain only on the understanding (which Augustine has shown to be mistaken) that the divine essence were a genus or species. Count nouns are, in Augustine’s analysis, either generic or specific terms, and “God” and “essence” in this context are neither—or at least, they have enough in common with mass nouns to render any plural usage illegitimate. (This is the case notwithstanding that we can say “*one* God,” “*one* essence”—something not possible with a mass noun. We can, of course, meaningfully speak of the *same*

<sup>52</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 107–14 (1:265). This claim allays one remaining fear that the analogy might cause, namely, that the sameness between the divine persons is merely specific, not numerical. On the numerical indivisibility of the divine essence, see e.g., *Epistola* 120.2.7 (*Epistulae* 31–123; ed. A. Goldbacher; Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 34/2; Vienna: Tempusky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1898) 710, 15–20.

<sup>53</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 98–102 (1:265).

<sup>54</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 102–7 (1:265).

<sup>55</sup> *Trin.* 7.6.11, 114–17 (1:265).

matter in such contexts, just as we can meaningfully speak of the same divine essence.) Augustine's best shot at an answer is an analogy, the example of common matter, and (as I have been arguing) the reason for this is that both "God" and "essence" have in common with mass nouns such as "matter" the fact that plural usage is illegitimate.

I take it, then, that Augustine has offered some kind of an answer to the fundamental puzzle and that, given the qualifications that he himself provides, there is no evidence that he believes the answer to be unsuccessful. But he confesses himself stumped by another question: "*Quid tres*"—"what *species* are the three persons?" He knows that the persons belong to a genus, and he has a pretty good idea as to what this genus is (it is the class of things that do not inhere). But he is puzzled by the lack of an appropriate species word here and obviously hesitant to use a merely generic word ("person") in the absence of a species word.

### ■ What, If Anything, Augustine in Fact Misunderstands

It seems, then, that Augustine is reasonably clear on the things he finds hard to understand, and what is odd is that, contrary to the suggestion made by Colin Gunton and quoted at the beginning of this article, none of them in fact have anything to do with Augustine's interpretation of the Greek-speaking theologians. Here I would like to consider whether there is any other evidence, at least from book 7 of *Trin.*, to support Gunton's claim that Augustine misunderstands the Greek theologians. As I indicated above, the observations I shall offer are limited in extent, and provisional, since a fully satisfactory treatment of the Greek traditions on the question of the distinction between person and essence, on the failure of the inference from three persons to three gods, and on the definition of the term ὑπόστασις, would require much more space than I can allocate here. The issue is made somewhat harder by the fact that we cannot be sure precisely which Greek theologians Augustine read. Irénée Chevalier has shown that Augustine read the pertinent sections of Gregory of Nazianzus and Didymus the Blind, and perhaps of Basil of Caesarea and Epiphanius of Salamis.<sup>56</sup> The Greek writer who deals most conspicuously with some of the issues discussed here, however, is Gregory of Nyssa, and I shall allow my discussion to include this Gregory too, since, from a conceptual point of view, he seems to be the most obvious source for, or target of, some of Augustine's remarks.

I have argued that the *aporia* left by Augustine in book 7 of *Trin.* is that our talk of three somethings or three persons in God is not wholly satisfactory, and that the reason for its unsatisfactory nature is that "something" and "person" are genus terms. We do not know what species the persons have in common, and we do not know what word we could use to refer to this species. Clearly, this puzzle is not dependent on any particular concerns about translation from Greek, but

<sup>56</sup> See Irénée Chevalier, *Saint Augustin et la pensée grecque. Les relations trinitaires* (Collectanea Friburgensia 24; Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1940) 98.

Augustine nevertheless makes explicit that he finds the equivalent Greek term ὑπόστασις equally puzzling, not least because the Greek writers use it without providing any definition of it (“I do not know what they intend to be the difference between οὐσία and *hypostasis*”). This is quite right: none of the Greek writers just mentioned offers any definition of the term ὑπόστασις (though they certainly know how they want to use the term).<sup>57</sup> Augustine seems to have understood this failing pretty well and to have made it his task in book 7 of *Trin.* to rectify it. The insight that “person” is a non-relational word—an insight that certainly seems to be an innovation of Augustine—perhaps makes the philosophical problem harder, but it does not change its fundamental nature. For on any plausible understanding of “person” in this context, there are problems preventing the inference from one God to one person. Furthermore, Augustine’s concern is a technical point about the word “person” and its cognates. Augustine certainly does not deny that the persons are distinct by relations or that “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” are relational words.

Beyond this, however, things get a bit more complicated. For Augustine explicitly rejects the view that the divine essence could be a genus or species, and the persons species or individuals, and he does so for two reasons: the divine essence is neither genus nor species, and “person” is a genus noun. The second of these claims—making “person” in effect a natural kind—seems to be his own suggestion, and it certainly provides a suitable philosophical underpinning for the legitimacy of the “three persons” formulation (there is some divisible kind under which we can count the persons). On the first, there is some *prima facie* divergence from the Greek tradition. Basil of Caesarea uses the analogy of a common genus and an individual instance of a species to explicate the relation between the divine essence and a divine person.<sup>58</sup> Still, Basil elsewhere is perfectly happy to use the

<sup>57</sup> In a recent study, Lucian Turcescu has argued that Gregory of Nyssa formulates the most sophisticated understanding of “person” and “individual” in antiquity. But on Turcescu’s reading, what this amounts to is, first, having a range of synonyms for ὑπόστασις; secondly, noting that persons are individuals (as opposed to universals); and thirdly, maintaining that they are collections of properties existing in “communion” with other persons. See Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Person* (American Academy of Religion Academy Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 116–17. Even if a definition of the word “person” could be formulated using these tools (and it is hard to see how it could, since the third conjunct would require use of the *definiendum*), Turcescu’s study makes it abundantly plain that Gregory himself does not tie all these threads together into one clear and explicit definition. For Turcescu, “communion” fundamentally involves the inseparability of the divine persons, spelled out in terms of the origination relations between them. That Augustine would accept this without any difficulty goes without saying. Indeed, to judge from well-known passages such as the following, he would go further: “[The Holy Spirit is that] by which the begotten is loved by the begetter and [by which the begotten] loves his begetter.” *Trin.* 6.5.7, 4–6 (1:235); “That ineffable conjunction of Father and Image is not without enjoyment, without love, without happiness. Therefore that delight, pleasure, felicity or happiness, if it can be worthily expressed by any human voice . . . is the Holy Spirit in the Trinity.” *Trin.* 6.10.12, 29–33 (1:242). The persons are not merely contemplated together by us; they contemplate each other too.

<sup>58</sup> See Basil, *Epistola* 236.6 (ed. Yves Courtonne; 3 vols; Collections des universités de France; Paris: Belles Lettres, 1957–66) 3:83–84.

analogy of matter and things made from the matter, as I pointed out above. What Augustine seems to be doing is simply restricting the range of valid analogies, presumably on the grounds that seeing the essence as a genus or species would make it impossible to resist the inference from three persons to three gods. Gregory of Nyssa encounters just this problem with the analogy to a species, and, in a notorious passage, draws the opposite philosophical conclusion to that drawn by Augustine. Since the analogy is good, it must follow that our understanding of species nouns in general—as count nouns—is mistaken. Gregory makes the metaphysical point in the strongest possible terms:

There are many who have shared in the nature [of man] . . . but the man in them all is one.<sup>59</sup>

So despite the well-known Greek use of the analogy between universal and particular, seeing the divine essence as a *species* (something explicitly rejected by Augustine), it is clear that even the person who uses this analogy most proficiently is fully aware of its problems. And the problem is precisely that which leads Augustine to reject the analogy: on the face of it, genera and species are *divisible* into particulars; the divine essence is *indivisible*. Gregory agrees, at least in certain texts, that the divine essence is coordinate and indivisible.<sup>60</sup> Viewed in this way, it is hard to see the divergence as implying anything more than an expression of a different set of philosophical choices (here about the divisibility/indivisibility of species), resulting in a different selection of appropriate analogy.

What of Gregory of Nazianzus, at least some of whose works were definitely known to Augustine? Like Augustine, Gregory is far more hesitant than his two Cappadocian friends to use the analogy to three human beings—indeed, he explicitly restricts the relevance of the analogy by arguing that species such as *man* are merely concepts, a move that would be exactly paralleled by Augustine's analysis if we adopt the conceptualist or nominalist reading of Augustine's view of divisible genera and species mooted above:

The community in this case [viz. that of three men] has a *unity seen only in thought*, and the individuals are different from each other, divided in time, capacities, and power.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium*, in *Opera Dogmatica Minora*. Part 1. (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera* III/1; ed. F. Müller; Leiden: Brill, 1958) 40, 17–18, 19; for the whole discussion, including the merely semantic claims about the proper use of the term “man,” see 40, 15–42, 12.

<sup>60</sup> See e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium*, 41, 2–7. For a good discussion of this, see Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 46; Leiden: Brill, 2000). Gregory's stress on this indivisibility of the divine essence makes him reluctant to think of the divine persons as (in any strict sense) *individuals*; on this, see Richard Cross, “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002) 372–410, esp. 405–8.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 31.15, 4–7, *Discours* 27–31 (*Discours théologiques*; ed. Paul Gallay; Sources chrétiennes 250; Paris: Cerf, 1978) 304 (my italics).

But, again, this is a concern about the divisibility/indivisibility of species, and certainly consistent with Gregory's professed acceptance—at least in certain passages—of a view of the divine essence that makes it coordinate and indivisible.<sup>62</sup>

## ■ Conclusion

Overall, there seems to be plenty of evidence against Gunton's claim quoted at the beginning of this article. Indeed, even the small amount of material presented here suggests that there is considerable divergence between the various Greek theologians—even those customarily given a single label ("Cappadocian")—such that we should not think of the late fourth-century Greek Nicene tradition as theologically homogeneous or unitary. It seems to me that there is no evidence at all in favor of any theologically significant version of Gunton's divergence claim, but demonstrating that would be the work of another article. What Augustine does not understand—and presents the Greeks as not understanding—is what species the divine persons have in common, since "person/ὕπόστασις" is (on Augustine's analysis) a genus word. His hesitancy about the word "person" is simply a function of his reluctance to use a genus word without an available species word. And this is a technical philosophical concern that has no bearing on the theological question.

<sup>62</sup> The key passage is Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 31.14, 2–9 (Gallay, *Discours théologiques*, 302); see too, e.g., *Or.* 30.11, 7–10 (Gallay, *Discours théologiques*, 246).



# The Self Before God? Rethinking Augustine's Trinitarian Thought

Matthew Drever  
*University of Chicago*

## ■ Introduction

What is often termed the modern crisis of the Western self<sup>1</sup> — the problems associated with the proto-Cartesian and proto-Kantian conceptions of the self — has given rise to attempts not only to confront the crisis constructively, but also to trace its origin. In one philosophical reading of the development of the crisis in the Western self, Augustine stands as one of its forefathers. In this reading, Augustine's anthropology is anchored firmly within Platonism and is viewed as a key precursor of the tradition leading to the modern, autonomous self of Descartes and Kant.<sup>2</sup> Such a reading often

<sup>1</sup> I should note that my approach to Augustine takes its orientation from a set of modern theological and philosophical problems associated with the nature of the self, and that these issues loom in the background. Briefly stated, one way of tracing this well-known modern crisis of the self is in terms of the rise of historical consciousness, which may be dated back to Herder, and which has been attended by the destabilizing and de-centering of the self as a result of various strands of thought: the increased awareness of the effects of history and culture on the self (e.g., Hegel, Marx, and feminist theory); the depths of the self beyond the rational, self-present 'I' (e.g., Nietzsche, Freud); the penetration of language into the self (e.g., Gadamer, Wittgenstein).

<sup>2</sup> Different versions of this narrative can be found in the following: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Cary is primarily concerned with analyzing Augustine's relation to Neoplatonism, but his argument moves the somewhat abridged claims of Taylor forward in important ways. Menn is more cautious in linking Descartes to Augustine, arguing that Descartes does not take from Augustine a specific set of metaphysical principles but rather an analytic method (which Augustine takes from Plotinus) of moving from sense experience to intellectual first principles. There is also a great deal of recent scholarship that focuses on Augustine's philosophical context but is not concerned with the relation between Augustine and Descartes. Some examples of this scholarship

focuses on Augustine's somewhat idiosyncratic self-analysis in *Confessionum libri* [Conf.] XIII, and points to his so-called psychological model of the Trinity found in *De Trinitate* [Trin.]. It is argued that his method of inward movement, which involves the utilization of the structures of individual consciousness as an analogy to the immanent Trinity, in conjunction with his analysis of the individual self in Conf., becomes a basic foundation for the modern private, autonomous self.

A second trend accompanies this particular philosophical reading of Augustine's anthropology. Michel Barnes has noted that much modern scholarship on Augustine by systematic theologians tends somewhat paradoxically to presuppose a philosophical foundation (in Neoplatonism) for Augustine's trinitarian thought rather than a Christian doctrinal foundation.<sup>3</sup> This often leads to criticisms that Augustine's trinitarian thought is overly speculative. On the one hand, it is argued that Augustine formulates a model of the Trinity based on an abstract, neoplatonic conception of the mind, which psychologizes God and potentially generates a type of onto-theology.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is argued that this philosophical model minimizes the significance of history and the incarnation, and so the economy of salvation.

In particular, Colin Gunton has raised pointed criticism of Augustine concerning the supposed foundation of his trinitarian thought in Neoplatonism. He argues that Augustine's famous analogy between the triadic structures of the mind—memory, understanding, and will—and the Trinity is fundamentally derivative of a neoplatonic philosophy of the mind that colors Augustine's model of the Trinity with an abstract individualism and intellectualism, and distances the Trinity from its ecclesiological and soteriological context.<sup>5</sup> Gunton contrasts this model of the Trinity with the tradition in the East of grounding the Trinity in the economy of salvation—God's self-revelation as Father, Son, and Spirit within salvation history.<sup>6</sup>

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are: James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Wayne J. Hankey, "'Knowing as We Are Known' in Confessions 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian and Christian Obedience to the Delphic Gnothi Seauton from Socrates to Modernity," *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2003) 23–48.

<sup>3</sup> Michel René Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 244. For a more specific analysis by Barnes of the Christian doctrinal context of Augustine's trinitarian thought, see "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: MT 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 329–55.

<sup>4</sup> The term "onto-theology" generally refers to a type of theology in which the metaphysical category of "being" is given a preeminent place in descriptions of God and creation. The term has two modern sources: Kant and Heidegger. For Kant, it is a subcategory of a type of theology that derives from reason (as opposed to revelation). For Heidegger, the term is synonymous with metaphysics and characterizes all attempts to describe God and reality according to a reified, abstract concept of "being." It is Heidegger who offers the strongest negative critique of onto-theology, a critique still being engaged in theology and philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 42–43.

<sup>6</sup> More generally, Gunton notes that Augustine's relation to neoplatonism, and especially to the neoplatonic conception of God as the One, leads to Augustine's emphasis on the unity of God

He summarizes the consequences of Augustine's model of the Trinity as follows: "The crucial analogy for Augustine is between the inner structure of the human mind and the inner being of God, because it is in the former that the latter is made known, this side of eternity at any rate, more really than in the 'outer' economy of grace."<sup>7</sup>

But what if the directionality between the mind and God suggested by Gunton is actually the reverse in Augustine's trinitarian thought? What if the structure of the mind is most fundamentally made known through the Trinity? Moreover, what if it is not the "inner being of God" that is at issue here, but the "'outer' economy of grace"? What if the God involved here is the trinitarian God of salvation? In this essay I shall address these questions by defending the following claim: Augustine's trinitarian thought does not move from the categories of the self to a description of the Trinity. Rather, the reverse is true: through a soteriological reversal, in which the self is first created and then re-formed by Christ, the Trinity is the basis for the self. This soteriological reversal is fundamentally tied to Augustine's anthropology and, more specifically, to his claim that the authentic self is not the self in full possession, power and knowledge of itself, but the self created in the image of the Trinity, possessed by God, and empowered through Christ. We shall see that an explanation of this soteriological reversal stands not only against categorizing Augustine's trinitarian thought as a psychological model, but also against characterizing Augustine's anthropology as proto-Cartesian.

To develop this argument, it is important to identify the proper framework for interpreting the trinitarian thought of Augustine. There has been a recent attempt in historical theology by Barnes, Ayres, and others to argue that many of the traditional categories for analyzing pre- and post-Nicene thought (especially the distinction between East and West on the starting points of *de Deo Trino* vs. *de Deo Uno*) are inadequate.<sup>8</sup> With regard to Augustine, it is argued that a framework grounded in either the East/West dichotomy or a neoplatonic context is inappropriate for interpreting his model of the Trinity. Such a framework distorts many of the Nicene themes—soteriology, ecclesiology, God/world relation—central to Augustine's account of the Trinity. A better framework is one that underscores Augustine's Christian doctrinal context (as opposed to his philosophical context),<sup>9</sup> as well

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(*de Deo Uno*) in contrast with the Greek emphasis on the divine economy (*de Deo Trino*). Thus, Gunton tends to endorse a distinction between East and West, which follows a popular reading of de Régnon, regarding how the doctrine of God is approached: the Latin West begins with the unity of God; the Greek East begins with the three persons of the Trinity. See Hennessy, in this issue, for a detailed discussion of this question.

<sup>7</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology"; and in this issue of *HTR*, see Lewis Ayres, "Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Introduction."

<sup>9</sup> On the importance of the doctrinal context for an interpretation of Augustine, see the work of Ayres and Barnes mentioned above. Also see the following articles: Lewis Ayres, "Augustine and the Rule of Faith: Rhetoric, Christology, and the Foundation of Christian Thinking," *Augustinian*

as the continuities shared by the various defenders of Nicaea (both Eastern and Western).

This essay does not enter the debate concerning the proper framework for interpreting Augustine at a general level. Rather, I shall offer some rather specific remarks about Augustine's utilization of the Christian doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei*. Much has been written on Augustine's formulation of these doctrines, and my point is neither to offer an evaluation of the existing secondary scholarship, nor to provide anything approaching a comprehensive analysis of Augustine's own account of these doctrines.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I shall examine how they frame an alternative account (to that of Gunton, Taylor, and others) of Augustine's trinitarian thought within a Christian doctrinal context, one that is responsive to Barnes and Ayres,<sup>11</sup> and one that uncovers the fundamental soteriological dimension underlying Augustine's trinitarian thought.

In his reconsideration of the doctrinal context of Nicene trinitarian thought, Lewis Ayres has traced several fundamental principles that run through Nicene theology, which are important for a reevaluation of Augustine's so-called psychological model of the Trinity. On the doctrine of creation, he has noted that pro-Nicene theologians work from a twofold relation between God and the world: God's immediate presence in creation, and God's distinction from creation.<sup>12</sup> In regard to the latter relation, Ayres argues that: "We have, then, arrived at the heart of this first strategy [of Nicene trinitarian thought] and at a fundamental aspect of the pro-Nicene life of the mind: reflection on the distinction between Creator and creation is the context within which all speech about God (including the God-given language of Scripture) must be considered and examined."<sup>13</sup>

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*Studies* 36 (2005) 33–49; Lewis Ayres, "The Christological Context of Augustine's *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII–XV," *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998) 111–39.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the work of Ayres and Barnes noted above, see the following scholarship for recent studies that address these doctrines and their importance for reading Augustine within a Christian doctrinal context: J. E. Sullivan, *The Image of God* (Dubuque, Iowa: Priority, 1963); Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity," in *Collectanea Augustiniana. mélanges T. J. van Bavel* (ed. B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houlin; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990) 317–22; Rowan Williams, "'Good for Nothing?' Augustine on Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994) 9–23; John C. Cavadini, "The Quest for Truth in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 429–40; B. Studer, "History and Faith in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 28 (1997) 7–50; Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Burnell, *The Augustinian Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to two of my teachers, Margaret Miles and Jean-Luc Marion, who have significantly influenced my interpretation of Augustine on this issue.

<sup>12</sup> The general contours of this line of thought on the God/world relation are certainly not unique to fourth- and fifth-century Nicene theologians. In modern systematic theology, this idea is often described by the phrase "God's transcendence-in-immanence": God's immediacy to all creation is God's transcendence from any particular part of creation. And it is usually accompanied by some apophatic statement about our knowledge of God, also important in early Nicene theology.

<sup>13</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 287.

Ayres goes on to note the fundamental apophatic dimension within Nicene trinitarian thought that characterizes God's participation in the world: "[For] pro-Nicenes, it is the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of such participation that is of paramount importance."<sup>14</sup> This strong epistemic limitation on access to God is certainly related to the ontological claim of God's radical distinctness from the world, but it also sets up a seeming paradox in the Nicene conception of the God/world relation: the God who is immediately present to the world is also the God who is mysterious and incomprehensible.<sup>15</sup>

To address the claims of both Barnes and Ayres, as well as the more general descriptions of Augustine's so-called psychological model of the Trinity, I shall turn to Augustine's formulation of the Christian doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei*, and how he employs them in his trinitarian theology. Here the anthropological question is crucial: how do the doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei* characterize the human self in relation to God? This question is important because for Augustine, as for other patristic writers, the mind offers the best analogy to the Trinity, and hence the relation between the self and God is fundamental to his trinitarian thought. This insight is famously explicated by Augustine in *De Trinitate* and has come to be called by some his psychological model of the Trinity. The doctrine of *ex nihilo* receives little explicit attention there, although it is central to a reevaluation of his trinitarian project. To grasp the anthropological application of the doctrines of *ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei*, we can turn to Augustine's commentaries on Genesis—especially *Conf.* and *De Genesi ad litteram* [*Gen. litt.*]. Here he offers a characterization of what it means for humans both to exist in the image of God and to be created out of nothing.

### ■ *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

Ayres has argued that the doctrines of simplicity and inseparability of operations are important strategies in Nicene thought, which are employed to articulate the nature and relation of the persons within the Trinity. Closely related to these strategies is the core idea of the way God is in contrast to the way creation is: God is his being necessarily; humans have their being contingently. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* grounds and sharpens this distinction. Humans are not the source of their existence, nor is the divine substance the source of their existence. Humans are created from nothing according to God's good purpose and experience this dynamic—between nothingness and goodness—as the root of their contingency.

Like other defenders of Nicaea, Augustine defends a strong qualitative distinction between God and creation, and in *Conf.* he traces its particular anthropological implications. It is common to read *Conf.* as centered around the two conversion

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that this theme, more generally construed, is also a hallmark of modern phenomenology. That is, in phenomenology it is often argued that, that which lies closest to us is also that which is the most mysterious.

narratives in books VII and VIII. However, this reading often misses Augustine's comments in book XII about the origin of the cosmos *ex nihilo*.<sup>16</sup> Here the origin of the cosmos from nothing is closely associated with its transitory, changing, and often unstable nature, and is contrasted with the eternal, unchanging God.<sup>17</sup> This contrasting dynamic is in the background of Augustine's analysis of the self in its relation to God in the earlier books of *Conf.* For Augustine, *creatio ex nihilo* identifies a fundamental potential for (moral and ontological) instability or mutability in human existence, exacerbated all the more by sin. The ramifications of this characterization of the self permeate the *Conf.*: the anxious grasping (*concupiscentia*) of the infant; the conforming effect, for good or ill, of friendship; turning to God during conversion;<sup>18</sup> the probing of memory and time (i.e., the *distensio animi*); and Augustine's continual struggle with temptation.

This reading of *Conf.* is related to an important line of modern Augustinian scholarship, evident in Miles, Hanby, Williams, and Teske, in which it is argued that the Augustinian self is not best conceived as a static, autonomous entity according to abstract philosophical/psychological categories, but rather as a dynamic and malleable relational entity. Miles describes the Augustinian self as "primarily a partially centered energy, initially barely distinguishable from its cosmic, physical, and spiritual environment, which comes to be cumulatively distinguished and defined by the objects of its attention and affection."<sup>19</sup>

Following this characterization of the Augustinian self, three points emerge that are directly relevant to the interpretation of Augustine's trinitarian theology, especially in *Trin.* First, the Augustinian self is *not* the proto-Cartesian, autonomous self. The autonomous self for Augustine—literally, the auto-nomos self, the self who is a law unto him or herself—is a self *ex nihilo* not yet formed into anything. The Augustinian self is a concrete self through its various relations, broadly construed to include material and spiritual relations.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the type of inward space that characterizes the concrete, historical self as *creatio ex nihilo* is a morally charged space of dynamic relation, and one in

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the common reading often ignores altogether the final three books of the *Conf.*

<sup>17</sup> *Conf.* 12.6.6, 12.7.7, 12.11.11.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the relation between contingency and turning, see *Gen. litt.* 1.1.2–3, 1.4.9, 1.5.10, 3.20.31–32, where turning is described both as the way the intellectual creation conforms to God, and as the way humans are converted through Christ.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*," *The Journal of Religion* (1983) 129. Also see Margaret Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (American Academy of Religion Dissertation Series #31; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1979); Williams, "'Good for Nothing?' Augustine on Creation"; Roland Teske, "Augustine's Theory of Soul," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 116–23; Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*.

<sup>20</sup> While it is true that spiritual reality pertains most intimately and truly to the self, it is incorrect to claim that material reality has no substantive value for the self. The doctrines of incarnation and physical resurrection led Augustine to advocate the irreducible value of material reality (body) for the self.

need of redemption. Not only is the self malleable and unstable, but it has been fundamentally corrupted through sin. This means that Augustine's inward turn into the self in *Trin.* does not represent a simple road through a stable psyche to the truth of the triune God. It is neither the inner-Cartesian space of rational self-reflection, nor the objective and transparent—geometrical, nomological—space of Newtonian physics. It is an ethically charged space, opaque and treacherous as a result of human sin, wherein one is easily deceived and corrupted. If the Christian wants to traverse this inward space to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Trinity, it is requisite to seek the soteriological purification of this inward space.

Hence, inward space is a soteriological space. This recognition is essential to an interpretation of the latter half of *Trin.*, where Augustine develops the analogy between the mind and the Trinity. If one acknowledges the primacy of the soteriological dimension within the inward space of self, wherein God's action is always the prior condition of truth and goodness within the self, it orients one to see a deeper directionality that Augustine establishes between the triadic structure of the mind and the three persons of the Trinity. The triadic structure of the mind does not provide the framework for understanding the triune God. Rather the reverse is true: the triune God establishes the triadic structure of the true self—the *imago Dei*—through which one comes to understand both one's self and God. It may be the case in *Trin.*, that the explanation moves from the triadic structure of the self to the Trinity. But this sequence is one that accommodates sinful humanity, who must move from the material to the spiritual, from the temporal to the eternal.<sup>21</sup> If this sequence is taken as final, then Augustine may be guilty of psychologizing the Trinity. However, the deep and often hidden soteriological movement is the reverse of the explanatory movement in *Trin.*: God's creating and saving act, which clearly has a triune structure for Augustine, establishes and restores the self as *imago Dei*, and in turn allows us access to the Trinity.

Third, while *Trin.* advances a positive soteriological relation between the Trinity and the self, it should not be inferred that the redeemed self experiences the full disclosure of God. The apophatic caveats in book 15 of *Trin.* serve as explicit warnings against this misconception. But Augustine's understanding of the self ought to provide a continual reminder throughout the latter half of *Trin.* that even the redeemed Augustinian self remains *creatio ex nihilo* and so subject to the limitations of its creatureliness.<sup>22</sup> On this point, Rowan Williams has argued that for Augustine, human salvation means "a movement into our createdness,"<sup>23</sup> and that even the *visio Dei* means seeing God according to our capacity within the order of creation. Related to this point is Ayres's more general twofold claim (noted above) that "pro-Nicene" thought is interested in preserving both the triune God's intimate relation with creation and divine mystery. The soteriological dynamic in

<sup>21</sup> *Trin.* 7.3.9, 7.4.12, 15.2.10.

<sup>22</sup> *Trin.* 15.4.26.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity," 321.

*Trin.* and *Conf.* supports this twofold claim: while human salvation restores the triune image of God within the self, this soteriological transformation does not do away with the limitations of human creatureliness, and so preserves a healthy respect for divine mystery. That is, salvation does not dissolve the gap between God and creation established in God's creating *ex nihilo*, and so it does not open the Trinity to full disclosure:

We must admit further that even when we are like him, when we shall see him as he is . . . even when this happens, if it does happen, it will be a creature that was once formable which is formed, so that it now lacks nothing of the form to which it was intended it should come; but even so it will not be right or possible to put it on the same level as that simplicity in which there is not something formable that has been formed or reformed, but just form.<sup>24</sup>

### ■ *Imago Dei*

Thus far, I have traced the significance of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* for reinterpreting Augustine's trinitarian and anthropological thought. In the course of the discussion, I have had occasion to mention the concept of the *imago Dei*. Now I shall turn more directly to this concept and the way Augustine's use of it underscores the argument I have been advancing. One of his important explications of this concept is found in *Gen. litt.* where he parses Genesis 1–2 in order to arrive at the essence of human nature.<sup>25</sup>

According to Augustine, all creation receives its order—its essence, or definition—through the Son. For most of creation this order comes via the *rationes* or ideas, eternally held within the Son, which are infused in creation as the *rationes seminales*. These seminal ideas provide the pre-established structure that governs the coming into existence of material objects. The order imposed on material creation through these ideas allows for the delineation of creation into a genus/species framework. Humans, however, are unique in material creation in that their order—essence, definition—does not follow pre-established *rationes seminales*, but rather arises through their turning to and recognition of God.<sup>26</sup> This is what it means for humans to be created according to the image and likeness of God. One consequence of this is that the essence of human nature cannot be understood within the genus/species paradigm that orders the rest of the material creation. The true essence of human nature is defined (if this term remains appropriate) by how it images God, and not the one God of Plotinus but the Trinity—"man is the image of the Trinity."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Trin.* 15.4.26.

<sup>25</sup> Prof. Marion has provided invaluable insight to me through various discussions on the topic of Augustine's definition of the self that flows out of his interpretation of Gen 1–2.

<sup>26</sup> *Gen. litt.* 3.20.31–32.

<sup>27</sup> *Trin.* 7.4.12. *Gen. litt.* 3.19.29.



Augustine is careful to differentiate the way the Son images God from the way in which humans do so. This is an important distinction, and one in which the key Nicene trinitarian themes of divine simplicity, inseparable operation, and unchangeability are operative.<sup>28</sup> The Son is distinct from creation precisely because the Son is God as the Father is God.<sup>29</sup> The Son is unchanging wisdom and blessedness as the Father is (and so also the Spirit). Augustine, being the close reader that he is, contrasts this with humans who are *according* to the image rather than the image itself. One way of parsing this distinction is in terms of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In *Gen. litt.*, Augustine describes the human imaging of God at creation as the turning of humans to God and compares it with the redemptive turning of humans back to God that occurs through the Word.<sup>30</sup> In both instances, this turning is a movement away from nothingness. In the latter case, it is a turning from the moral nothingness of sin; in the former case, it is a turning from the nothingness out of which all finite existence arises.

This has significant consequences for understanding the project of *Trin.* If the true essence of human nature is the *imago Dei* and this is given in the turning of humans to God from the nothingness out of which they were created, then the resources available within the self for understanding God are also given in this turning to God. The self opens to God or to nothing, so that apart from God the self has no real or true form through which to understand God. Hence, Augustine's inward turn into the self has as its precondition God's self-revelatory actions of creating and redeeming the self, in which God is revealed as the triune God.

Here again, as we saw above, there is an underlying reversal in the movement to God as it is described in *Trin.* Though Augustine narrates the movement of the self to God as a process of going into the triadic structures of the self and then up to the triune God, this should not be interpreted as the establishment of a psychological model of the Trinity, or as the prefiguring of the independent, autonomous self, which has its own resources for understanding the divine. The autonomous (auto-nomos) self, the self who is a law unto him or herself, is most fundamentally a self who is a law unto nothing. The movement of self to God is premised on the opposite and prior movement of God to self: it is only because God has created humans in the image of the Trinity and redeemed that image through Christ that the human self has a triadic structure capable of granting some understanding of the Trinity.

<sup>28</sup> It should also be noted that these doctrines are integral to Augustine's formulation of the Trinity in the first half of *Trin.*; see *Trin.* 4.5.26–27, 32; 7.1.2; and the summary in 15.2.6–12; 15.4.22–24.

<sup>29</sup> *Gen. litt.* 1.5.10, 1.10.20.

<sup>30</sup> The language of turning is a favorite way in which Augustine describes the human relation to God.

## ■ Conclusion

On a general level, the relation Augustine continuously draws between the self and God, and self-knowledge and knowledge of God, is neither new nor unique to Christianity. There is a long history of sophisticated speculation on this topic in Greek philosophy, especially in Platonism. What is unique to Augustine is his use of the Christian doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei*. I have argued that his use of these concepts in *Conf.* and *Gen. litt.* as a way of conceiving the relation between the self and God is a necessary framework for interpreting how the triadic analogies of the mind function in *Trin.* to image the Trinity. In each case, the directionality between the mind and the Trinity moves from God to the self. More specifically, underlying Augustine's trinitarian thought is the prior action of creation and salvation imparted from the triune God to the self, an action which allows the self to image the Trinity and so move back to God.

It is this way of orienting the relation between the self and God, along with Augustine's conviction of the ultimate mystery of God, that underlies his apophatic turn in Book XV of *Trin.* All analogies between the self and the Trinity break down at some point, not only because of the inherent limitations of human language, but also because the self that discloses the Trinity is itself first disclosed under the conditions of creation and mystery. That is, the self in itself is ultimately nothing and only has form (intelligibility) insofar as it images the Trinity. Thus, the mystery that cloaks God applies to both God and the self insofar as the triadic analogies that Augustine finds in the self, if they faithfully image the authentic self (i.e., the *imago Dei*), will always bear traces of the mystery of God.

I have attempted to show that this line of argument has consequences not only for reinterpreting Augustine trinitarian thought, but also for reinterpreting his anthropology. Augustine's insistence that the self is in the image of the Trinity, in conjunction with his claim that the self's imaging of the Trinity is according to God's prior action of creation and salvation, not only moves Augustine's account of the Trinity beyond that of a monistic neoplatonism, but also moves his anthropology beyond that of a proto-Cartesianism. We have seen that the doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and the *imago Dei* highlight Augustine's utilization of key Nicene trinitarian themes: God's immediacy to and yet distinction from creation; God's disclosure to the self and the paradoxical presence of mystery in both God and the self; and the soteriological dimension that permeates creation and the self. We have also seen the close relation Augustine maintains between the Trinity and the self. Thus, it is fitting that as scholars reexamine the way Nicene themes function in Augustine's trinitarian thought, this will lead to the application of these themes to Augustine's anthropology and to a rethinking of his conception of the self.

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- 145 Response to Ayres: The Legacies of Nicaea, East and West

*John Behr*

- 153 Yes and No: Reflections on Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*

*Khaled Anatolios*

- 159 A Response to the Critics of *Nicaea and Its Legacy*

*Lewis Ayres*

- 173 Final Reflections

*John Behr and Khaled Anatolios*

### **PART II:** Beyond “East” and “West”: Re-Thinking Paradigms and Sources

- 179 An Answer to de Régnon’s Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of “His” Paradigm

*Kristin Hennessy*

- 199 Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus

*Christopher A. Beeley*

- 215 *Quid tres?* On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in *De Trinitate* 5 and 7

*Richard Cross*

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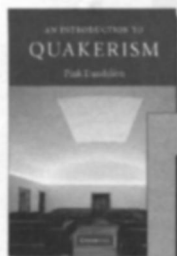
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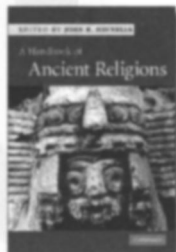
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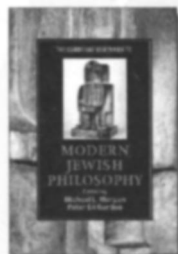
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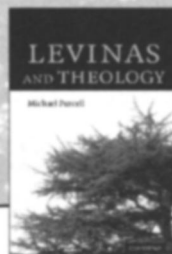
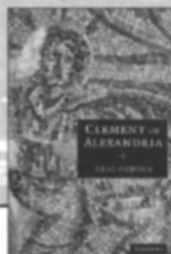
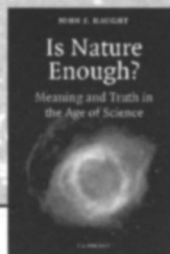
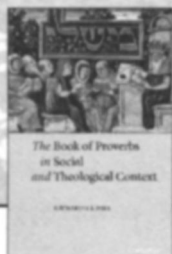
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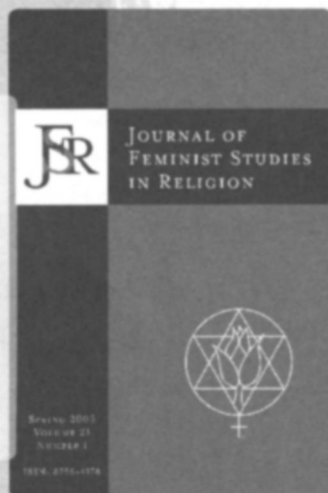
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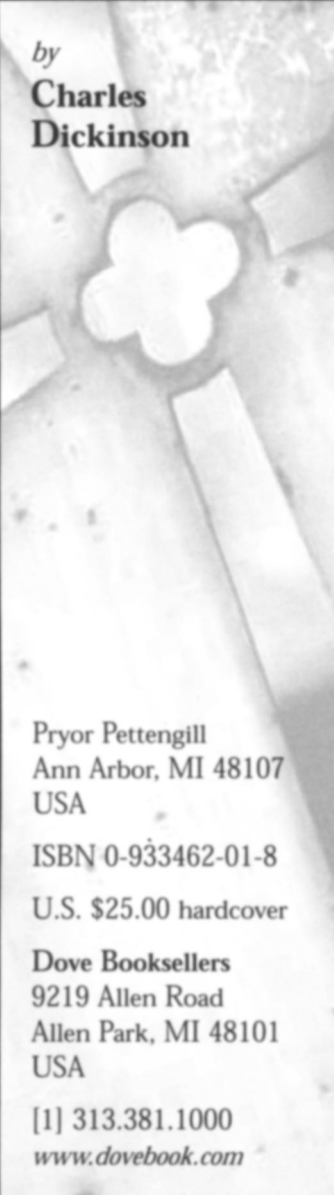
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